

# Massachusetts Department of Children and Families

## Sibling BILL OF RIGHTS



**Preamble:** The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families recognizes the importance and value of sibling relationships. These rights are intended to guide the Department and our providers in the delivery of care and services to foster youth with the commitment to permanency, safety and well being. This Bill of Rights was developed by the New England Youth Coalition with the support of the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors.

**Whereas:** the importance of sibling relationships are recognized and respected;

**Whereas:** sibling relationships provide needed continuity and stability during a child's placement;

**Whereas:** the sibling bond is unique and separate from the parent-child bond, and may include relations with people not linked by blood;

**Whereas:** siblings share similar history, heritage, culture and often biology that must be preserved;

**Whereas:** sibling separation is a significant and distinct loss that must be repaired by frequent and regular contact;

**Whereas:** every foster child deserves the right to know and be actively involved in his/her siblings' lives absent extraordinary circumstances.

### Every foster child:

1. Shall be placed with siblings.
2. Shall be in close proximity to siblings if unable to be in same setting to facilitate frequent and meaningful contact.
3. Shall be afforded contact with siblings regardless of geographic barriers. The methods for contact should be outlined in the child's service plan.
4. Shall be actively involved in his/her siblings' lives and share celebrations including birthdays, holidays, graduations, and meaningful milestones.
5. Shall maintain consistent and regular contact that will be included in service planning.
6. Shall be included in permanency planning decisions relative to his/her siblings. Foster children should know what the expectations are for continued contact when a sibling is adopted or guardianed.
7. Shall be notified by the Child Welfare agency or its agents regarding a sibling's change of placement.
8. Shall be informed when a sibling is discharged from foster care. Alumni shall be allowed to maintain contact with a sibling who remains in state care.
9. Shall be supported by the Child Welfare agency in his/her efforts to maintain relationships with siblings who are not in care or have been adopted or guardianed. The Department shall facilitate such contact as appropriate.
10. Shall have predictable, regular contact with siblings that shall not be withheld as a behavioral consequence absent safety concerns.



*Signed on this day*

**MAY 24, 2012**

*by the Commissioner, Youth and Representatives of the*

**MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**