

**S.B. 124 Child Welfare Modifications- the 'Gavin Peterson' Bill**  
**Sen. Luz Escamilla & Rep. Christine Watkins**

S.B. 124 creates a new, narrowly tailored legal tool that allows courts to authorize limited access to a child when there are serious, evidence-based concerns for the child's safety. It establishes an Investigative Warrant as a distinct mechanism to ensure officers and case workers can see and assess a child when access has been denied and there is a credible threat of harm, as defined in statute, but removal is not yet warranted.

Gavin Peterson was a 12-year-old boy from West Haven, who had multiple interactions with DCFS between 2013 and 2024 following reports of abuse and neglect. Despite years of concerns, DCFS was unable to physically see Gavin during the final year of his life after access to him was denied. When Gavin was brought to the emergency room, he was severely malnourished, covered in bruises, and in organ failure. He later died of sepsis caused by pneumonia, dehydration, and infection.

This gap or loophole was described by Kevin Franke, former husband of convicted child abuser Ruby Franke, to the Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel's hearing relating to the Franke children. On July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, he said:

*"In the aftermath of my wife's and Jodi's arrest, I've come to learn that Jodi masterfully coached Ruby in navigating the child welfare loopholes in this state. In a nutshell, all they had to do were three things. One, keep the children isolated from the world. Two, ignore all the phone calls from DCFS workers. Three, not answer the door when DCFS and or police officers knocked. That's it. Those three things were all that were required for all of the trainwreck that you've seen play out in the media for the past year. Because of the complete isolation of my children there was not sufficient evidence based on our current laws for the government to intervene despite the clear red flags reported by our close friends and neighbors, and family as well. This allowed Jodi and Ruby to emotionally and physically terrorize my children behind closed doors. Even those that were the closest to the situation were screaming repeatedly to authorities for help, and those authorities claimed to be powerless in the situation to intervene. Representatives, laws need to change in this state."*