

Statement in support of Senate Bill 204

Children and parents deserve the right to enjoy one another's company. In fact, the relationship between a primary parent and a child is crucial for the development of that child. A foster parents role is to provide temporary placement of a child whenever a primary parent is unavailable or unable to perform his or her fiduciary duties due to extenuating circumstances. It is not an opportunity for a foster parent to assume the role of primary parent and/or limit the interactions between a parent and their child and goes against guidelines set by courts across the country in preserving families.

As someone who has custody of a child that is not my own, I know this better than anyone and even more so considering that I was adopted by my older brother. While I actually have full guardianship of my great- niece, versus fostering, I do my best to ensure that she has a healthy and safe relationship with her mother and younger brother. At only seven, she asks about her mother and her brother often and I would be remiss to deny her these relationships.

While my niece is on visits with her mother I am full of apprehension and questions but I recognize the joy she feels when she interacts with her mother and brother and the sadness felt when the visit is over. I'm certain that she wonders why she can't stay and doesn't quite yet understand the responsibility I have in ensuring that she is safe and adequately cared for. Despite my own apprehension, it is because of this joy and the obvious connection she has with her primary parent and sibling that I feel obligated to set my own feelings aside for the overall health and development of my niece. The other option would be to deny her this right, deny her feelings and potentially risk further damaging her development.

Foster parents who deny adequate time for the primary parents to interact with their children are doing a disservice to the children in their care and are not operating under the guise of a temporary guardian. Unless their rights are completely severed by court order, parents have a right to develop strong relationships with their children, even in situations where such relationships may be strained by the parents circumstances.

My heart breaks whenever I hear of situations where parents rights are being trampled by foster parents who have little hope in redemption. Many of us have fallen on bad times and been in situations that we wish we would have handled differently. My own mother is a prime example, though she made bad choices at no point in time did she stop loving me as her child and I can't think of a time when I was denied interaction with her and I cringe to think of what would have happened if it did occur or where our relationship would have ended up.

I encourage you all to vote in favor of Senate Bill 204. Family preservation is tantamount except in the most egregious examples of abuse and parents who are on the road to redemption deserve the right to build and maintain healthy relationships with their children, despite the feelings of apprehension and questions that foster parents may have. Unless the court orders otherwise, foster parents who are denying these rights are over-stepping their bounds and obligations and parents deserve to be protected.

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