

Senate Judiciary Committee

Testimony in support of SB410

February 10, 2016

My name is Kathy Winters. I have found through contact with numerous families and CiNC cases that when the foster homes are more open to communication with the parents and also, also allow the parents communication with their children, there is more likelihood of family reintegration. When the foster parents' goal is adoption of the foster children, they seldom encourage communication with parents and parents with their children. The foster parents may have their own agenda and that is continued placement and future adoption of the foster children into their own family unit. This also can encourage intentional or unintentional actions by the foster parents to make it more difficult for the biological parents to get their children back home.. I have actually known of cases where foster parents actually sabotaged the parents' efforts to get their children back.

I do feel that volunteer foster parents would be great for the following reasons:

1. Volunteer foster parents' intentions are typically pure and not tainted for their own benefit or agenda and for no other reason but to help the child(ren) get through this difficult time in their lives..
2. Would encourage children's interaction with their biological parents and family members and also interaction between voluntary foster parents and the children's biological parents.
3. Would have no incentive to have placement or adoption of children other than just a pure desire to help children and their families who are having a temporary hard and stressful time in their lives.
4. This would save taxpayers millions, if not billions, of dollars for foster care and the perks that are paid to foster parents, i.e., daycare while they work, improvements to their homes to accommodate the foster children, new cars to accommodate the foster children, placement of a different foster home so that foster family can go on vacation WITHOUT their foster children, foster parents are paid approximately 9 to 10 times more than family placement, respite weekend payments to other foster parents, etc.
5. I do believe voluntary foster home is a win/win for the children and their families and for the taxpayers.
6. To narrow the selection down to husband and wife homes, will narrow the volunteer "pool" and will deprive children of good, loving temporary, volunteer homes. There are older individuals who are retired that have a lot to give to a foster child as a temporary home. There are single individuals who would love to give a child a temporary home. I, myself,, 65 years old, am a grandmother of 14 biological grandchildren. I have a 6 bedroom, 3 bathroom home and all my children are grown and I worked for government approx. 20 years and no criminal record.. There are others (single or elderly), who have the time and financial ability to give voluntarily a good home and their time to needy children. When you are so specific regarding

the dynamics of a family placement you are cutting out a lot of great, loving volunteers and your volunteer pool will be depleted more quickly.

7. Foster care should never be the first choice, it should be the very last choice when all other family placement options have been exhausted.

8. I have been a parent ally in numerous cases with both Caucasian and African American families and they have expressed to me that they want their recommendations be considered when placement is with a foster home that is outside of their ethnicity and culture.

I agree, there has to be THOROUGH background checks, random drug testing, and even psych evaluations sometimes in order to ensure the safety of these children. This is required of the biological parents, why shouldn't it be required of anyone, including foster parents, who will care for that fragile child.

I think even judges, lawyers, and caseworkers (anyone who has the power to affect that child's life so drastically) should be required to take "pop" drug tests and psychiatric tests on a regular basis.

I do believe that NO, WE DO NOT NEED MORE FOSTER HOMES.! What we do need is more family preservation when abuse or neglect is not proven on a beyond a reasonable doubt basis and without factual, physical evidence, not just a mere thought by someone. ALSO, we need more FAMILY PLACEMENT per state and federal laws. This is NOT being adhered to and there are no consequences nor responsibility when it is not done. There are family members LITERALLY BEGGING for their biological loved ones, their own God given gifts. Yet, 70% of children in state custody and possibly more than that, are in foster homes and foster home adoption of these children is being preferred over family placement or adoption.

I was told by Brian Dempsey, former DCF employee, that at that time 70% of children in state custody are in foster care (and I think that is intentionally stated low) and that when a child is eligible for adoption, wherever the child is at that time, even if they are in foster care and if the grandparents or other family members request adoption, THAT CHILD OR CHILDREN WILL STILL BE ADOPTED TO THE FOSTER HOME because that is where the child(ren) are at the beginning of the adoption process..

All that family members want is their biological children. When a child is taken from their parents, typically the children not only lose their parents, but also, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends and grandparents. This is extremely traumatic and will affect that child the rest of their life. This is Crimes Against Humanity and must stop NOW! WE MUST DO WHAT IS "LEAST DETRIMENTAL TO THE CHILD" AND THAT IS FAMILY PRESERVATION OR FAMILY PLACEMENT.

I am a proponent of voluntary foster homes and SB410 whenever a foster home is needed, otherwise, it has been shown that some foster homes are nothing more than mercenaries and it is just a bounty over these children's head.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

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