

February 17, 2025

Do Pass HB 1034

Dear Chairman Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Department,

Here's the thing we do not talk about enough, the biological bond of families is incomprehensibly strong, and we do not fully understand its implications. Kids can be removed from dangerous homes and never stop missing and yearning for their families. We saw it with every child we fostered and have heard it over and over from every case worker with whom we have ever worked. The foster care system, while well intentioned, is fundamentally broken, often doing more harm than good. As a state, we have made early intervention at maintaining the family of origin a bigger priority in recent years. It is logical then to recognize the possibility of redemption and the mending of a bond once believed broken beyond repair.

There are children in our foster care system that are suffering needlessly, while longing for their biological families. Simultaneously, there are biological parents, who have done the work to turn their lives around, living with soul deep agony, that could be given the opportunity to raise kids and healing wounds only they can heal.

My name is Kara Gloe, LCSW. I am a clinically licensed social worker practicing in North Dakota and a former foster parent. It is at this unique junction of experiences that I provide this testimony.

In 2006 my spouse and I became foster parents. Our first placement was siblings, a two-year-old boy and a three-year-old girl. They lived with us for approximately six months before reuniting with their biological mother. During that time, we fell madly in love with them and were both overjoyed for them given the opportunity to reunite with their biological family and devastated by their loss.

For years, we remained in contact with both them and their biological mother, offering as much support as we could. After a few years, while we were living in another country, their biological mother reached out and informed us that our daughter had been sexually abused by her biological mom's boyfriend. Their biological mom was appropriately distraught, hurt, and angry that someone she trusted and allowed into her home had hurt her daughter in such a way. After that, we lost track of her and them entirely, despite regular attempts to find them.

Ten years after the kids left our home, I was notified by a friend that our sweet children were available for adoption. Things had changed drastically in our lives. We had two biological children of our own, but in that moment, I realized there was a part of me that had held out hope that we would be reunited with them. After discussing it with my spouse, we contacted their social worker, explained who we are to the kids, and began getting to know them once again. Our then 13-year-old daughter had been in 14 different foster homes and 10 different schools. Our son's time in foster care was much similar with a few placements in residential foster agencies mixed in. Needless to say, they had experienced untold trauma in the foster care system.

After about six months, we completed our home study and finalized our application to once again become their foster parents with the intention of adopting them. I remember our first family dinner. I felt as though pieces of my heart I did not realize were gone, snapped into place.

We also re-established a relationship with their biological mother, who was sober, had worked a steady job for several years, was living with her partner, and helping raise his son. The kids had not seen their mom in years, but their yearning for her never diminished. We eased the kids into having a relationship with their mom, by first allowing them monitored contact. As she continued to demonstrate appropriate behavior, we allowed them more open access to one another. Additionally, now that the roles were reversed, she did her best to support us. We talked frequently. She provided much needed context for understanding their behaviors. She visited. She dolled out tough love, had difficult conversations, and never missed an opportunity to tell them how much she loved and missed them and how sorry she was.

Despite their mom's support and our diligent efforts to do everything we could, the years of trauma experienced in the foster care system and the multitudes of broke promises, rendered us ultimately unable to continue being their foster parents, to say nothing of adopting them. They needed more support than any untrained professional could give them. They were not healing, and our entire family was suffering. We made the absolutely devastating decision to no longer be their foster parents. This agonizing failure was why I went to graduate school to become a therapist.

When they returned to foster care, they were split up, despite their case worker's promise they would not be. Over the next few years, until they aged out of the system, they were once again placed in several different homes, never together. Our daughter was once again put in a therapeutic foster care facility. Both kids ran away from their placements several times, always being eventually found and brought back into care by their biological mother.

There is no doubt in my mind that our kids would have been much better off with their biological mother, years before they were ever put on that AdoptUs.org site. However, her rights had been terminated, so the years of therapy and work she had done to turn her life around would never have been enough to consider her as an appropriate caregiver for our children.

If we believe in rehabilitation for others, why not for biological parents who can demonstrate that they have changed? I know it would have meant a world of difference for my kids. **For them, I ask you vote DO PASS on HB 1034**

Sincerely,
Kara Gloe, LCSW