



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:

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House Bill 1457 House Health and Human Services Committee Representative Weisz, Chairman January 23, 2023

Chairman Weisz and members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Rep. Brandon Prichard and I represent District 8 which covers all of Emmons County, rural and suburban portions of Burleigh County, and Wilton which is in McLean County. I am here to testify in support HB 1457 which would give preference to foster families in the adoption process if the family has raised the child from infancy, cared for the child for over six months, or if the intent from the foster parents was to adopt the child from the beginning of the foster process. HB 1457 would make adopting a child easier and more equitable for foster families. Notably, there is an exception for ICWA which federally mandates that a Native American child be prioritized to Native American families.

Currently, the process for adoption allows blood relatives who have never seen the child get preferential treatment over the foster parents. Families who entered the adoption pool without a connection may also get preferential treatment. HB 1457 would reorder the process by giving the preferential treatment to the family which has raised the child or cared for them for over six months. We need to stop looking at family as only a blood connection and begin to realize that family stems from emotional connections within a shared household. It can be heart-wrenching for a foster family to watch the child they raised be stripped away from them because they were not first in line in the adoption process.

I would like to suggest a simple amendment to HB 1457 for the purpose of clarifying the language. On page 2, line 6, I would suggest changing the language to "since the child's birth until one year of age." This would remove any ambiguity about the word "infancy."

I encourage the Health and Human Service Committee to support foster families who want to adopt children in their care. I respectfully ask for the committee to support HB 1457 by giving the bill a "Do Pass" recommendation.