



North Dakota House of Representatives

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House Bill 1534 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 1534 which would combine the home studies for foster care and the adoption process. The process of adoption should be easy if a licensed foster parent wants to take the next step and raise a child in the foster care program. This bill would streamline the process and encourage adoption for foster parents.

The home study is an evaluation of prospective adoptive families and of the physical and emotional environment into which a child would be placed. It consists of a series of interviews with a social worker, including at least one interview in the home. During this process, families will, with the social worker's assistance, consider all aspects of adoptive parenthood and identify the type of child they wish to adopt. Some agencies use a group approach to the educational part of this adoption preparation process because it creates a built-in support group among families. In North Dakota, families adopting children from foster care are trained through the Foster / Adopt PRIDE model - a training program that familiarizes families with the needs of these special children.

Many of the questions asked in the home study are personal. These questions are necessary for the social worker's evaluation of prospective parents. Some questions are about income, assets, and health and the stability of the marriage (if married) and/or family relationships. Physical exams to ensure that prospective parents are healthy are usually required. North Dakota requires prospective adoptive parents to undergo a fingerprint and background check to ensure that individuals do not have a felony conviction for domestic violence or child abuse. A home study is usually completed in a few months, depending upon the agency's requirements and the number of other clients.¹

¹ [Steps to Adoption: Adoption Program: Children and Family Services: Services: Department of Human Services: State of North Dakota](#)

Unlike adoptive home studies, the foster care studies a family for the temporary care of children while they are under the custody of the agency and have the full support of case management and other services. Upon conversations with the Department of Health and Human Services, adoption studies are slightly more comprehensive in nature and more global in their assessment of the family since they are recommending the family for a lifetime commitment to a child's safety and well-being. However, the redundancy is staggering, and few differences exist between the processes. In fact, the largest change between the adoptive process and the foster process is simply the time the adult(s) intend to care for the child.

Therefore, after speaking with foster parents around the State of North Dakota who have adopted children or who are working through the process, a common complaint has been the unnecessary repetitiveness behind the home studies. While opponents of this legislation would argue that the intended timeframe for holding a child differs between foster care and adoption, why should the state be allowing children in the foster system to stay with a foster parent who is unsafe? If we are allowing an individual or family to become licensed foster care providers, they should be trusted with a child regardless of the timeframe. The adoption process is long enough for perspective parents. We should not make it more complicated for foster families who have been through a almost verbatim process.

I would like to suggest a simple amendment to HB 1534. Upon discussions with the Department of Health and Human Services, I realized that a complete combination of the adoptive process with the foster process is not possible. In particular, the background check is a federal requirement by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Including language in the bill about the requirement to complete the background check would comply with federal guidelines.

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 1534 by giving the bill a "Do Pass" recommendation.