

Testimony
House Bill No. 1534
House Human Services Committee
Representative Robin Weisz, Chairman
January 23, 2023

Chairman Weisz, members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Melissa Anderson, a licensed foster parent of 11 years and mother to (currently) 12 children who have joined our family through various means... biologically, foster care, adoption, and guardianship. I submit this testimony in support of House Bill 1534, which waives certain adoption requirements for licensed foster care providers.

To become a licensed foster parent, we undergo numerous steps to ensure that we are a safe, stable option for the children that will potentially be placed in our home. These steps include fingerprint background checks, references, trainings, and a home study, among other requirements. Each year after becoming licensed, we must renew our license by completing more paperwork that includes background checks, health questionnaires, financial forms, and more. A state licensing worker then visits our home where it is inspected closely. During this licensing home visit, we also sit down for a face-to-face interview.

When a child is placed in our home, our home becomes a revolving door to caseworkers who visit (at least) monthly, therapists of different specialties, as well as a Guardian ad Litem. These professionals become an extension of our family because they get to know us so well through the children we serve.

By the time a child is eligible for adoption, they have typically lived in their foster home for several months, or in some cases like ours, several years. Another background check and full investigation is not necessary — we submit to these every year already. We are currently waiting to finalize the adoption of our little girl. She is a sibling to our son that we adopted in 2016. She

has been with us since she was barely one. Today, she is just three months shy of six. The parental rights of her biological parents were terminated eight months ago, yet she is still not adopted because we must first submit a full investigation to the court. Being that she came to us first through a private agreement with her first parents, and then a legal guardianship through the courts, we received no financial assistance from the state. Every cost, was and will still be, paid out-of-pocket by us, including the costs associated with another investigative home study. We paid our own legal fees as we tried to keep her safe while she endured two traumatic reunification attempts, which totaled nearly \$30,000. We took her to weekly mental health therapy sessions throughout the process. We watched our happy, thriving little girl turn into a shell of herself, often emotional or withdrawn, all because the law says guardianships are meant to be temporary (that will be testimony for another time). I will never forget how my heart broke when her preschool teacher told us how our girl went from coloring beautiful, colorful pictures in class to using a black crayon and scribbling over the lines. When we were finally able to terminate rights last spring, we saw the smile come back to her face and the color return to her masterpieces.

Our daughter was adamant that she change her name, one can only guess that she wanted to put the trauma associated with it behind her. She started kindergarten last fall and wanted so badly to be adopted before school started so that she could use her chosen name. It didn't happen. She's able to use her new first name in her classroom but is reminded of the trauma every time we must go to an appointment or register her for an activity and still have to use her other name. She has been waiting to become an Anderson for months now, only because the court requires a full investigative study. She has been waiting for permanency now for 1,732 days. Please don't make her wait any longer.

I urge you pass HB 1534 to eliminate the investigative study requirement for licensed foster parents trying to adopt a child in their care. Please consider adding an emergency clause to bring this bill into law sooner rather than later. Thank you.