

House Bill 1492
House Judiciary Committee

Chairman Klemin and members of the Committee, my name is Paula Schwab. I am the adoptive mother of a child with mental injury as the result of abuse and neglect. I am here as a voice for my daughter in support of House Bill 1492.

When my daughter was born, she tested positive for methamphetamine, yet she was sent home with her birth mother. Her birth mother continued to struggle with mental health and substance use issues and was not consistently feeding and caring for her child. There was also domestic violence in the home. At 6 months, she was hospitalized for failure to thrive and severe malnutrition. She was skin and bones and her development was extremely delayed.

I am a licensed foster care provider. When she was released from the hospital, she came to my home. The parental situation never improved and after nearly 3 years, parental rights were terminated, and I adopted her.

Children exposed to methamphetamine in utero are at risk for future problems such as failure to thrive, growth delays, developmental delays or disorders, neurological abnormalities, cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, emotional and stress-related impairments, and motor impairments. Malnutrition is associated with both structural and functional pathology of the brain. A wide range of cognitive effects have been reported in malnourished children. They can struggle with poor growth, attention, working memory, learning memory, and visual ability,

My daughter is now 7 and continues to face several of these challenges. She has a paraprofessional with her throughout the school day. She is on an Individual Education Plan, or IEP and has an altered curriculum. She has physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy every week. Despite all the challenges she faces, she is an amazing little girl and has made great strides.

I have fostered 15 children over the last several years and nearly all of them entered the foster care system due to abuse and or neglect by a parent with substance use issues. Their stories are heartbreaking. Addressing the role substance use plays in many abuse and neglect cases is crucial to the health and wellbeing of so many children. I respectfully ask that you consider an addition to number 5 of this bill to include substance use evaluation.

I appreciate your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.