Testimony
Engrossed House Bill No. 1457
Senate Human Services Committee
Senator Lee, Chairman
March 20, 2023

Chairman Lee, and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Cory Pedersen, Director of the Children and Family Services Section with the Department of Health and Human Services (Department). I appear before you in opposition to engrossed House Bill 1457 and ask the committee to give it a do not pass recommendation.

Federal regulations under Title 42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(19) require each child in foster care to achieve one of the five approved permanency goals: reunification with parents, guardianship, placement with a fit/willing relative, another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA), or adoption.

Federal law requires states to _consider relatives_ of the child for placement preference. Foster parents _may be considered_ for a more long-term permanency option, but are not guaranteed to be a permanent placement option for a foster child.

While we appreciate the effort to get children to permanency as soon as possible we would caution the committee that this change may have unintended consequences pitting custodial agencies against state licensed foster parents. It could potentially set up a race to the courthouse. When it comes to what is best for the child, licensed providers are part of the team lead by the custodial agency; and this law change sets up what could become an adversarial process.

In summary, foster care is intended to be temporary and if adoption is the selected permanency plan, effort must be made by the custodian to rule out relatives before "considering" the licensed foster care provider as the adoption option.

There are many barriers that delay permanency for children. The Department is committed to continuing to look for opportunities to improve practices and processes, keeping the best interest of the children and families we serve at the center of our work.

This concludes my testimony, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.