

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

My name is Ruby Ritchie. I am here to testify in support of house bill 1457 and ask the committee to give the bill a “Do Pass” recommendation. This bill would give adoption preference to foster families who are caring for a child who is in the process of adoption rather than giving preference to a relative. According to house bill 1457 sections 4a-c this would give preference to foster families who have had a foster child in their care “For six months or longer leading up to the termination of parental rights; “Since the child’s birth or infancy;” or “With the intention of adopting the child.”.

Foster care is never a permanency plan. Foster care agencies work to ensure that children in foster care are working towards reunification until termination of parental rights occurs. At this point a child would be moved into the adoption process. This bill would make it easier for the child in a foster home to be adopted by the foster care provider they currently live with if the foster care provider is interested in adopting the child. If the relative of the child gets preference, the child may not be placed in a home that is suited for their needs. Foster care agencies have higher levels of need for children who need treatment foster care. These homes are equipped with families who have gone through trauma informed education and classes to prepare them for caring for a child with high needs. If a relative is given preference rather than a current foster home, the relative may not know how to best care for the child.

According to Foster Care Services Permanency Planning Service Chapter 624-05 chapter 5 section 12 a-d; “Relative” is defined as:

- a. The child’s grandparent, great-grandparent, sibling, halfsibling, aunt, great-aunt, uncle, great-uncle, nephew, niece, or first cousin;

b. An individual with a relationship to the child, derived through a current or former spouse of the child's parent, similar to a relationship described in subdivision a:

c. An individual recognized in the child's community as having a relationship with the child similar to a relationship described in subdivision a; or

d. The child's stepparent.

It is important to know what giving preference to a relative really means, this relative could even be considered as "An individual recognized in the child's community as having a relationship with the child similar to a relationship described in subdivision a which states - The child's grandparent, great-grandparent, sibling, halfsibling, aunt, great-aunt, uncle, great-uncle, nephew, niece, or first cousin;"

If a child in foster care has already been placed in a secure foster home and the custodian and foster care agency has found this to be a permanency option due to the attachment and connection of the child and foster family has made with one another, it may be in the child's best interest to avoid another disruption and transition and keep them in one home. This concludes my testimony and I encourage the committee to support house bill 1457.

