

Testimony Prepared for the
Senate Human Services Committee
March 15, 2023
By: Kim Jacobson

**RE: HB 1534: Relating to creating waiver of certain adoption requirements
for licensed foster care providers**

Chair Lee, and members of the Senate Human Services Committee. For the record, my name is Kim Jacobson. I serve as the Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director with the service areas of Traill and Steele Counties. In addition, I serve as President of the North Dakota Human Service Zone Director Association. I am here today to provide testimony in opposition of HB 1534.

Human Service Zone Directors, the Division of Juvenile Services and Tribal child welfare agencies serve as legal custodians of foster children when care/custody/control of children is removed from their parents or legal caregivers. Foster care is a complex system with many legal and case management child-specific considerations. When children cannot be successfully reunited with their parent, the Court may consider and order a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR). At this point, a child is free and eligible for adoption, which is considered a final permanency option. When a TPR occurs, the responsibility for making adoptive placement decisions and consenting to adoption, falls upon the duty and authority of the Human Service Zone Director.

As a Human Service Zone Director, this is one of the most important responsibilities and duties that I am obligated to fulfill. At times, this is a very straight forward decision. Other times, there are multiple individuals who all love and want to be the identified adoptive placement for a specific child. I find adoptive home studies critical to my decision-making process. It helps

me explore the needs of the child and fit of the perspective adoptive home. It is important to remember that home studies for the purposes of foster parent licensure are very different than the home studies for adoptive placement. Foster care is intended to be short-term, temporary care to meet a child's immediate needs. It is with that intent and lens that foster care home study/licensure is fixed upon. However, adoptive home studies are a much more robust process looking at the interested parties to meet the long-term needs of a child, through special needs adoption. Adoptive homes are forever homes. Adoptive placement is a significant and life altering decision. A decision that forever impacts a child and something that should not be rushed or be subject to short-cut.

While I understand the intent of HB 1534, it does remove a valuable, essential, and non-duplicated assessment as well as a critical tool to those who bear the responsibility of making adoptive placement decisions. For these reasons, I urge a Do Not Pass on HB 1534.

Thank you for considering of my testimony. I stand for any questions the committee.