

Good afternoon Senate Committee Members

My name is Bailie Graner and I am in favor of passing HB 1534. I am a foster mom and almost adoptee mother who saw a flaw in the system and knew we could fix it. I'm going to layout why passing this bill is important for the kids, court system, state social work team members, and state funds.

I want to first give you a background on how adoption through the foster care comes about. First reunification with the parents is the number one priority of the foster care system and social work team. Should that goal not be attainable, all suitable family members are sought out for a permanent home for the child. In our personal case, the family who was suitable was not able to take on another child. So now I have a good friend who is also my daughter biological auntie. Now we are at a place when adoption needs to be sought out by non-family members. The first choice is the foster family who they have been living with. Just for context the sweet girl we have has been in our home for 2.5 years.

We do an in-depth study of our home through the foster licensing process. Then when a placement comes into our home, The social work team gets to really know us, on a very personal level for many months and years. They come into our home monthly for visits and safety checks. We are all part of the co-parenting team when it comes to doctor's appointments, forms that need to be signed, and so on.

When family is not able to care for the child, the social work team will then choose us, the foster home, to be her adoptive parents, not an agency. There are federal laws in place in the foster to adoption process that will not be affected by this bill. Federally, the child needs to be in the home for a minimum of 6 months, we need to be finger printed for a second time, and have no large life event for 1 year. What I am saying is we are not looking for loopholes or short cuts, because they will not exist. With this bill, we will be cutting out a redundant second home study paperwork that was already fulfilled in our initial foster licensing. This second home study is delaying the adoption process. Why do we need to re-prove we can take care of her. Since beginning our second home study back in July, so 8 months ago, we are still not done.

This bill will not necessarily affect the current families who want to strictly foster and without adopting. Instead, this is creating more accessible opportunity to continue to care for a child who is in their home who needs that permanent plan. We can then do the federal adoptive paperwork if it appears that a child is going to be a permanent resident, or we can even fill out the paperwork right away when initially licensed for the families who are able to adopt.

Now having been through both home studies, what we have found to be different is a deeper look into our finances and the health of our marriage. I ask now, in what financial circumstances would a child not be adopted by the foster parents. The answer is never. Financial status does not prove safety or wellbeing of a child. If that were the case, if any family were to fall below the federal poverty line, those children would be in foster care. Even in our fostering license process, we have to prove that we can care for children without the stipend.

Now with this delayed adoption, we are also tying up the court system. We have another permanency hearing coming up to tell the judge that we are still working on adoption. This court time could instead be used for the families and children who need it. I won't dive into this rabbit hole too deeply but you just have to ask someone in the court system "how far out is a court date in family court if you need to reschedule?"

The State's social work team is also tied up with our delayed adoption process. My now case worker can not take any new cases until our daughter is no longer on her work load. So for an extended 8 months she is essentially tied up while we are in this second home study period.

Let's talk about our state dollars. The state continues to pay a stipend for a child while they are in the home during the second home study. So for round numbers let's round to \$30 a day times 30 days a month equals roughly \$900 a month. We will use roughly 10 months for the second home study by our own example and I know of some who have extended well into a year. So that is \$9000 roughly per child that is paid during this interim second home study time. Last year in North Dakota there were 250 of our kids who were adopted out of foster care. So now take that \$9000 times 250 children a year. That is roughly 2.5 million dollars a year being paid by that state during this waiting period. How about who pays for the second home study to be completed by an outside entity? I do not have the cost that our tax payers are paying for that, but we can figure some money into that as well.

We have other states who are already doing 1 home study to suit the state for foster care and follow federal guidelines for adoption. I do not have the exclusive list, but my examples are Montana, Georgia, Washington and Oregon. Again, this is NOT private adoptions and this bill is strictly affecting those who are already fostering.

You are going to hear that the foster system is designed to be temporary while adoption home study is for permanency. I ask then what is temporary and what care requirements are different. Temporary is the goal of foster care, however as you heard it is not always the reality. Our foster son who is also in our home was initially placed for a temporary 10 days. He has now been with us for a year and a half. So what is really the difference in being able to take care of someone "temporarily" vs "permanently".

If we are good enough to foster, we are good enough to adopt. I also want you to know that this bill will no longer affect me personally, but it is a great fix. We can really impact other children by achieving permanency sooner. Thank you and pass 1534

As a mother who has gone through both home study processes, I stand for any questions.