



Testimony on HB 1034
North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers
February 17, 2025
Senate Judiciary Committee

Chair Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

The North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-ND) supports HB 1034 which provides biological parents a pathway to regain parental rights. Promoting family preservation and reunification, this bill aligns with social work values by recognizing personal growth and supporting best practices in the child welfare system.

Currently, biological parents lack the ability to regain parental rights once they are lost. The loss of reunification not only affects the biological parents' well-being but also the well-being of the child, ultimately contributing to the number of individuals within the child welfare system and negatively impacted by it. The Family First Prevention Act demonstrated the success of family preservation strategies, and HB1034 builds on this foundation, helping keep children out of the foster care system while empowering parents to demonstrate meaningful change through personal development.

I spent 14 years in the child welfare system in North Dakota from the age of 5 until 19. I experienced 7 placements, including a group home facility (because there weren't enough foster homes in the area) and a failed adoption placement. Each move caused disruption and some caused trauma; multiple studies have shown the myriad negative impacts from changing placements within the foster care system, from diminished mental health and academic performance to drug and alcohol addiction, increased incarceration rates and ultimately contributing to significant less chances at outcomes of success for individuals who experience multiple placements within their time in care. I vividly recall listening to a talk at a national conference that I attended during college about the impacts of multiple placements on children. tears rolling down my face as I reflected on the 7 placements I had within my time spent in care. The outcomes for individuals with backgrounds like mine typically end in drug/alcohol addiction, the criminal justice system, poverty and lack of employment, teenage pregnancies and a lot of times death.

That statistic and its reality affects so many people—but it does not define them. Because in reality, if it did, statistically I shouldn't be writing you this testimony. I often reflect on how my life - and my mother's - could have been different if she had been given another chance. My mother's loss of parental rights initiated strong feelings of guilt, loss of hope, diagnosis of depression and ultimately changed the entire trajectory of her life. There were so many profound impacts from the loss of parental rights on our relationship that we deal with to this day. Losing parental rights should not mean losing hope for reunification. People are capable of growth and HB 1034 recognizes that change is possible and attainable. As individuals we shouldn't be defined by our biggest mistakes. Instead, we should empower, support and encourage individuals in using their experiences and adversities as lessons and an opportunity for change and growth.

NASW-ND supports legislative efforts that promote social justice, dignity and personal growth. We urge the members of this committee to vote DO PASS on HB 1034, as it removes systemic barriers, promotes family preservation, and upholds the belief that individuals are not defined by their past but have the capacity to change.

Respectfully,

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North Dakota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers