

## Testimony for the Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight

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The DCF system is broken for foster care. DCF has complete control as to where children are placed, as do the contractors they employ. The way the law is written gives the court little input into where the children are placed in spite of any facts presented at the hearing.

We are here today to present facts and ask questions.

We are addressing two current DCF practices that, in our opinion, are detrimental to the children it serves.

- 1) The child/children are almost always placed with a relative. While a relative should be considered other factors should be examined. Based on our experience if a relative is available they are given the child/children with no vetting.
  
- 2) Above all else DCF insists on siblings being housed together even if it's not in the best interest of the children.

We believe our involvement with 2 young children entering the foster system substantiates the need for change. The facts of our experience are as follows.

**Their Mother:** A mother of 10 children with 9 different fathers, none of whom she married, was in stage 4, terminal cancer. She asked a friend of 5 years if she and her 2 youngest children, ages 4 and 6 years, could move in with him. She was being physically and mentally abused by the father of the 4 year old. The friend agreed and they all lived with him until she had to be placed in the hospital for end of life care. At that time she asked that he continue to care for her 2 children.

**The Children:** Girls, ages 4 and 6 years old. They had not been socialized, nor had the 6 year old attended school. The friend potty trained the 4 year old, prepared balanced meals, taught the need for daily cleanliness, respect and discipline. Plus he provided quality attention, time outside to learn about gardening, animals, and good old fun. We and the friend arranged for the 6 year old to enroll in kindergarten. The 4 year old was in the process of enrolling in preschool. Both girls were excited for school. They also expressed their feelings of being loved and safe.

### **Further Details:**

After the mother died and the children were in the care of the friend, we visited with the local DCF administrator and gave her full details of the girls' situation. Including that the father of the 4 year old was currently in the Cloud County Jail for threatening to kill people at our local hospital and residents of

Concordia. We also informed DCF that the grandmother of the 4 year old had her 7 children taken away from her for negligence. The grandmother is the mother of the father jailed for threatening to kill people. She had not been a part of the girls' lives.

Immediately after the death of the mother, the grandmother arrived to take the children away from the friend whom the mother wanted her children to live with.

When he would not relinquish the girls, the grandmother called the police. The police called DCF. The DCF administrator arrived with 3 squad cars(lights flashing). There had been no action on the part of DCF after our visit and DCF in fact, continued to allow the children to stay with the friend. But on this day, a week later, the DCF administrator told the girls she was taking them to a safe place.....the police station and a group home in Andover. With the officers standing in the living room, arms folded over their chests, she told the girls to get into separate police cars(lights still flashing). They were not allowed to say goodbye to the friend who had been caring for them for 3 months or us. They had trusted us to keep them safe. Tears were rolling down their faces with a look of terror in their eyes.

At the court hearing DCF gave custody to the grandmother of the 4 year child. Two teenage half sisters were located and placed with the grandmother as well.

The case was turned over to the contractor, St. Francis Ministries. We met with them and asked several questions about foster care. There had been no vetting of the grandmother. No checking on the housing. We gave them information on both. There are photos attached to show the housing. The grandmother kept the 6 year old out of school for 3 weeks, where she was learning and receiving counseling for the abuse she witnessed of her sick mother and subsequent death. The grandmother made the decision to not let the 4 year old attend preschool. She thought she might homeschool her.

St. Francis also checked with the incarnated father of the 4 year old to see if he had any interest in the children. And were attempting to be in touch with the father of the 6 year old. He is in prison until 2025 after being convicted of child pornography of the two teenage half sisters who are now living with the grandmother.

### **Our Questions/Concerns**

Why did DCF disrupt a safe and well adjusted environment and place 2 young girls with a relative that had a background of neglect for her own children? Is it because of their policy of placing children with a relative at all costs? Are no other avenues investigated? Additionally 3 children who were not relatives of the grandmother were placed with her. Seemingly because of the policy of placing siblings together.

These 2 young girls loved and trusted the friend and us and were thriving! Suddenly this was taken away because of the DCF policy that children should be with a relative. The foster system for children needs to be better than what DCF provides. The future of children turned over to DCF rests with you.

Change the policies to provide the best possible future for children in foster care. The current policy needs to be changed so that other factors are considered instead placing them with a relative, no questions asked.





