

February 11, 2015

Judiciary Committee Members,

I am a Licensed Master Social Worker who retired from DCF in 2013 after 21 1/2 years in child protective services. The primary focus of my work during those years was with children in foster care. In addition, I was a licensed foster parent prior to my DCF employment. I have worked with, been in, and been aware of many foster homes and foster home problems during my career. For many years, I have been the permanent custodian for four children who came to me with prior foster care placements. I feel qualified to say that SB 158 is bad law and will not achieve what is intended.

SB158 appears to reimburse foster parents for who they are (paid "substantially more" for meeting certain criteria) than for meeting high level needs of children in their home. Foster care placements and reimbursement should always be about best meeting the needs of the individual child, not about rewarding the foster parents for meeting a stereotypical mold.

SB158 clearly supports home schooling. Home schooling can be a wonderful asset for children. Frankly, I wish I could do it, but as a single parent, it is just not feasible. Although I admire those who do it well, as you know, there are really no home school laws with teeth in our State. Home schooling can be used to cover a multitude of sins and often is. Removing foster children, who are truly the most vulnerable, from the mandated reporting eyes and ears of the public school system is irresponsible. I have experience with foster parents perpetrating physical abuse, sex abuse, emotional abuse, etc., on foster children, and it only was revealed when the child told someone at school. You have to understand that many of these children come from homes where they learned to keep secrets, learned not to trust adult parent figures, and learned not to confide in anyone they consider connected to the foster parent; therefore, their place of safety is their school.

SB158 identified a CARE family in narrow ways while good families come in all constellations. Some of the foster parents that I experienced abusing foster children would have met SB158 criteria with no problem. Further, I believe it is possible that the narrow definition used may cause the State to be vulnerable to a Federal lawsuit based on discrimination, and our State budget simply is not in a position to defend another suit.

I heartily agree with the need to improve the recruitment and selection of foster homes. Every foster child should have a safe, secure, well-trained, committed placement. But this Bill does not do it! Please do not pass it out of Committee.

Thank you for considering my thoughts,

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