

February 15, 2020

The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: In Support of SB585

To the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Joseph Gresock and I am a therapeutic foster parent who resides in Laurel, Maryland.

I support SB585 for the following reasons:

- As of 2013, Maryland was the state with the 5th longest average time for children to stay in foster care [1]. Four years later, Maryland has fallen to 4th longest average time in care. The current average duration in care in Maryland is 33 months [2], as compared to the national average of 21.9 months. I believe this bill would be a step toward reversing this trend. The sooner these children achieve permanency, the sooner they can begin healing the trauma of remaining in limbo for years on end.
- As of 2017, Maryland had an average of 4.79 placement transfers per 1,000 days in foster care [2]. As the federal Adverse Childhood Event (ACE) study demonstrated, these placement transfers have devastating adverse effects on our children, especially the youngest group of 0-5 years old, which comprise about 33% of Maryland's foster children. Any improvement to the average duration in care could reduce these placement transfers and will especially benefit this youngest group of children due to their developmental level.
- Based on my experience and the testimony of other foster parents I know, local DSS departments in Maryland seem to often disregard the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 (Public Law 105-89) that calls for Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) when a child has been in care for 15 of the past 22 months. Some DSS workers and children's attorneys seem hesitant to follow this guideline, and simply leave the children in limbo for months and years while pursuing one plan which turns out to fail. Enforcing concurrent planning sooner in the case could turn this around and achieve permanency much faster.

I would like to share my experiences from one of my foster cases that leads me to support SB585.

In April 2017, my wife and I received a 2-month old, who had been in another out-of-home placement since birth. Baltimore City DSS pursued single-track reunification with the mother until he was 16 months old, and then added the concurrent plan of guardianship with a family member. From this point, it took an additional 16 months before the child was finally transitioned to his relative. It seemed that DSS's "time in care" clock started over once the

concurrent plan was added, but this does not honor the real impact of the lack of permanency on the child.

After 16 months of trying something that the DSS worker later acknowledged she didn't think would work, the case was now moving frustratingly slowly. It took 6 months for the grandmother's home to pass the inspection that would allow her to be approved for placement. At the one and only Family Involvement Meeting, the DSS case manager said she wanted to "wait until the weather gets warmer" before increasing the duration of visits at the grandmother's home, as if the child wasn't simply remaining in limbo while we adults waited for Winter to end.

When we asked the worker 25 months into the case whether it was time to start pursuing TPR (based on being long overdue the 15 of past 22 months ASFA guideline), she literally laughed and said "that's what it says, but that's not how we do things." She also told us it was too much work to prepare for a TPR trial, so she'd rather pursue the kinship placement (which at that point took an additional 7 months to enact). When we asked the child's attorney about the ASFA timeline, he said he thought it had something to do with the states getting funding, but didn't really need to be followed.

If SB585 was in place, I believe DSS would have been required to pursue both of these tracks at the same time near the beginning of the case, potentially cutting in half the child's time in care. Additionally, I am concerned that the attitude of this case worker, case manager, and child's attorney could be present in other cases, causing children to languish in foster care with no push from the adults to give them permanency.

Indeed, other foster parents we interviewed indicated that 4-6 years before permanency is more the norm in places like Baltimore City. It may take a long time to change this culture of being content with the status quo while the children wait for permanency, but SB585 is a necessary step in the right direction.

Please accept this as my written testimony for the judicial proceedings committee hearing.

Sincerely,

Joseph Gresock
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[1]

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/report/temporary-haven-children-and-youth-are-spending-less-time-foster-care/time-care-national-trends-and-state-differences>

[2]

<http://dhs.maryland.gov/documents/Data%20and%20Reports/SSA/Annual%20Progress%20and%20Services%20Review%20Report/2019%20APSR%20Report/MD-FY19-APSR-Report.approved.pdf>