

February 6, 2020

RE: HB 369 and SB 586

My name is Katie Fitzsimmons, I have been a licensed foster parent for almost two years and I live in Edgewater, MD. I also currently serve at the President of the Anne Arundel County Foster Parent Association.

Today I ask for your support of HB 369 and SB 586.

We became a foster family in April 2018 and picked up a little boy from the hospital, weighing less than 5 pounds and who had completed his drug detox, on June 11, 2018. We still have the privilege to care for him and he still a foster child, 605 days later.

Being a foster parent offers more challenges that one could ever imagine. We are front row spectators to our kids heart breaking trauma. Trauma they did not ask for or deserve. We dry their tears when they miss their parents. We slowly work to heal their scars. We take the yelling and screaming after a parent misses a visit. We work with our educators to make sure IEPs are enforced. We make sure to be at each medical and therapeutic appointment, attend extra-curricular activity, visits with social workers, CASAs, attorneys.

Yet, in court, when life changing decisions are being made about the future of kids who we care for, we have no voice.

HB369 allows foster parents the right to offer valuable insight and knowledge to the legal record. It guarantees that we will be notified of each court hearing and provides us the right to speak in court – neither of which we are currently guaranteed.

Additionally, HB369 would allow foster parents access to important documentation about a child's case. Today, when kids come into care, foster parents are provided with bits and pieces of information about the child's background. We take the small puzzle pieces and try to make something sensible of it. But this puts us behind. To best service kids with severe trauma, understanding their background allows foster parents the ability to call on the right resources to begin the repair that is required.

Our case is 605 days old. Had we had the opportunity to be a legal party to our case, it's likely our foster son's permanency would have come sooner. We also would have more health records for him which is critical as he has on going, health issues.

What we are asking is not unreasonable. We are asking for a voice. We are asking that we be more informed. We are asking for your support in caring for the youth in our communities who need us most.

I urge you to support HB369/SB586.

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