

Hello,

We are foster parents in Anne Arundel County. 2 of the children we have fostered required intervention services for cognitive, developmental, and physical delays. One of the children came to our home directly from the NICU. As a result she qualified for services directly. Her sister was 16 almost 17 months when she came into care. She had to qualify for early services because it took her pediatrician months to get copies of her birth record, and other information. We did not have visitation with the parents at that time so we also could not ask them directly. At the same time, those conversations would not have created a good relationship for helping the child. What person would want to be asked if they had been taking drugs, exposed to lead, or other risk factors while pregnant by a person who is currently caring for your child because the state took the child from your care.

It is also unjust that we have no guaranteed legal seat at the table during court hearings. Not all hearings are relevant to the foster parents, but TPR and CINA hearings certainly are. Though DSS volunteers and employees have important and informed testimony, there is no other view that can replace a foster parent's, and that perspective should not be allowed to be summarily dismissed.

The purpose of this bill is to make caring for children in Foster Care more effective. The more information a foster parent has about a child, the more they can support the child, access the services the child needs, and be a better parent.

In an ideal world, no child would require foster care because there would be someone who could care for that child. Alas that is not the current state.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

Kellian and Nicholas Tonetti
3001 Beech Bottom Road
Laurel, MD 20724
kellian.tonetti@gmail.com