

Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary and Distinguished Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am here today in strong support of HB 1342. This bill seeks to remove implicit bias from the child removal process. Several years ago in Nassau County, NY the local Social Services office realized they had an issue with the bias of their caseworkers and social workers impacting who they were recommending for child removal. With the assistance of Dr. Jessica Pryce from the Florida State University, they implemented a Blind-Removal Process, whereby the caseworker or social worker in charge in the file would redact all potentially biasing information from the file before presenting the case to their superiors for approval of removal.

In my written testimony you will see the resulting study. Nassau, County did not expect to see the drastic changes that resulted. They saw an over 54% reduction in child removals in their county with NO INCREASE for adverse outcomes for children at all.

I want to make it clear that inherent bias is something that all people have and I appreciate that work that social services does. However, there is always room for improvement and as the removal of one's child is in itself an incredibly destructive experience for both parents and child, we should take every care we can to incorporate best practices into the states policy on child removal. 54% of children who have been through the child removal process have mental health issues. If we want to help prevent unnecessary ACE's. This is an amazing first step to take.

I have spoken with the opposition and I am entertaining amendments to specifically address some of their concerns. I will say that this Blind Removal Process does not impact meetings that do not pertain to the decision to remove. If subsequent plans are made as to location that the child would be most appropriately placed, then certainly factors such as religious beliefs may be considered at the request of the parents or legal guardians. Those beliefs, however, absolutely should have no impact on whether a child need be removed.

Thank you,

Delegate Lauren Arian