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The Maryland House of Delegates

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Testimony in Support of House Bill 369 – Foster Parents, Preadoptive Parents, and Caregivers – Right to Intervene

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of **House Bill 369 – Foster Parents, Preadoptive Parents, and Caregivers – Right to Intervene.**

Currently, in a court proceeding concerning a child, the child's foster parent, preadoptive parent, or caregiver must be given notice of the date, time, and location of a proceeding and the right to be heard. This bill establishes a right to intervene for foster parents, preadoptive parents, caregivers, or attorneys. Such intervention allows the court the opportunity to and benefit of understanding the interests and perspectives of additional individuals who have had significant interactions with the child.

A foster parent is not currently considered a party under law. This bill establishes that a foster parent who has exercised their right to intervene is considered a party. The bill extends to kinship parents rights foster parents have under current law. It also establishes a right to intervene for kinship parents as well as a right for both foster and kinship parents to obtain documented nonprivileged information pertaining to a child's placement. A kinship parent is someone who is related to the child by blood or marriage with whom the child may be placed for care.

The measure also requires the circuit court to give notice, in addition to the local department of social services. This requirement provides additional assurance that proper notice is served.

The purpose of the bill is to ensure that a court hears from all relevant individuals when overseeing a child's welfare and determining the placement that serves a child's best interests. Moreover, the measure provides foster and kinship parents added assurance of receiving information helpful to them in establishing a nurturing environment for children in their care.

Respectfully, I request a favorable report for House Bill 369.