

February 5, 2020

Maryland General Assembly

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing in support of the proposed bill, MD House Bill 369, pertaining to allowing foster parents and relatives caring for children in DSS custody to have "Intervener Status" in court cases of children in their care.

I hold a Master's degree in Social Work, and having been employed as a specialized foster care worker and a foster care supervisor, I am well aware of the complex issues of the foster care system. That being said, I have often wondered why the foster parents who are responsible for the child in their care are not given the opportunity in the court setting to voice concerns, ask questions, and advocate for the child's best interest. The foster care parents are the individuals who see the child in their home, in their school setting, and in social situations. As the round-the-clock caretakers, they are also often the only adults who directly witness the child's behaviors, emotional responses and special needs.

I strongly believe it is the duty and also the right of a foster parent to be an advocate for any foster child in their care. Due to the large caseloads and high turnover in the foster care profession, the foster parents sometimes have the most consistent, thorough, and ongoing knowledge of the child they are caring for. I also believe that the foster parents are often uniquely qualified to answer questions about the child for the judge, the lawyers, and the other vested parties in the court proceedings.

Having worked with many foster care parents, I honor the hard work they do, caring for children who have experienced significant disruptions in their lives. These parents pour love into the child they are serving and raising, and they are often shut out of the very processes where they would be best able to advocate for the child. These loving foster parents desire to advance the health and well-being of the child, having walked with him or her through the traumas he or she has faced. Furthermore, they wish for the child not to be traumatized again by a legal system that does not fully understand the child's needs. I support these foster parents in their efforts, and I support this bill which allows them greater access to the legal proceedings affecting the child in their care.

Sincerely,

Teresa P. Mohr, MSW

teresaphil@jemstone.com