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### **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1155 Foster, Kinship Parents, Preadoptive Parents, and Caregivers – Right to Intervene**

HB1155 establishes rights for foster parents, kinship parents, preadoptive parents and child caregivers to intervene as a party in a Circuit Court case involving a child who has lived in a foster parent's home for more than one year. This proposed legislation allows foster parents who want to participate in the court's decision making process, to inform the court as to whether the plan is meeting its objectives, and if not, what can be changed to address the problems.

Currently, foster parents are not considered a party. They can speak to the court, but then have to leave the courtroom. They are not allowed to hear what is being said about the status of the placement, or whether it is achieving its goals. In fact, they can't even see what DSS is telling the court about what's going on in their homes. Instead, the court holds a hearing where only the parties participate, and then foster parents are told what is going to happen with the children who have lived in their homes for more than a year.

The bill allows foster parents to intervene. If all is going well, and DSS and the birth parents are doing what they are supposed to, the foster parents probably won't spend the time and money intervening.

The right to intervene also extends to kinship parents.

The option to intervene after a child has been in a foster home for one year is nothing new. House Bill 1155 is modeled after Washington, D.C. statute. In fact Washington, D.C. thought it was so important to give foster parents the right to intervene that the D.C. law provides lawyers to foster parents who cannot afford them. However HB1155 does not adopt this provision. Foster parents who want to intervene will have to pay for their own lawyers.

The purpose of HB1155 is to ensure that the court hears from all relevant individuals in child abuse, termination of parental rights, and adoption proceedings. The proposed legislation also provides foster and kinship parents the ability to receive information helpful in providing the best possible care and nurturing environment for children in their care during traumatic and emotional times.

Social workers are only required to visit the child once a month, and due to case overload, often do not do that. The child's assigned attorney only visits about once every six (6) months. Thus, there is often a dearth of information. This information could be obtained from these proposed intervenors.

Please support HB1155 by a favorable report.