

## Legislative testimony for HB 1155

Good Morning,

I am a current resource/foster parent and adoptive parent from Montgomery County, Maryland. I am writing in support of HB 1155, which allows foster, pre-adoptive, and kinship parents a seat at the table in court.

I have been a licensed foster/resource parent for 15 years. I fostered my son for almost 3 years before I was able to adopt him. I only was able to adopt him because his biological mother moved out of state three months before he was to be reunified with her.

In 15 years, I have never been allowed to attend a full court hearing. I was asked to leave the court every time. I learned my son was to be reunified by overhearing his biological mother speak outside a court hearing in March that he was to be reunified with her in June. His social worker confirmed when I asked but hadn't informed me after I had care for him for 2 years at that point.

I was able review some of the court summary at my adoption disclosure meeting. While his mother made every visit, she didn't complete anything else on her case plan as documented in court records. The court ordered psychologist stated she should never be left alone with children let alone have custody. Yet, child welfare continued to push for reunification.

I have watched testimony on the previously introduced reform bills. I watched the opposition speak untruths about what 'rights' foster parents currently have in Maryland. It is very disheartening. The opposing attorney said we already are notified of court hearings. Incorrect. We are supposed to be notified per the Foster Parent Bill of Rights. I was never proactively notified in writing. Opposition suggested rather than introducing new legislation, fix current issues. Who will oversee that reform? Having the courts notify foster/resource parents of court hearings would be a huge benefit. But, this is just one piece of the proposed legislation.

Maryland is 4<sup>th</sup> state from the last in reaching permanency for children. Children linger in care long past the federal goal of a permanency plan if child has been in care 15 of the most recent 22 months. This is especially hard for very young children some who come into care at birth. Two, three, four years in care is huge.

There is much turnover of caseworkers. Be it regular movement from intake, to ongoing, to adoption (if it gets to that point) as well as staff turnover. Some people have 3, 4, 5 caseworkers in a year. Information about cases gets lost. Resource parents care for the children 24/7 and have valuable information. We lose the opportunity to correct information, or provide additional information, when we are required to clear the court room. Case workers don't always supervise visits. In 15 years, I've only ever had a lawyer, or paralegal, come visit the week of court for less than half an hour. Shouldn't the people who spend the most time with the children be able to advocate for them?

Resource parents understand that reunification is the primary goal of foster care. Resource parents understand the rules of confidentiality. Past opposition has stated that resource parents are typically more affluent and better educated than biological parents and would have an unfair advantage advocating. First, biological families are appointed legal counsel. Second, wouldn't you **want** resource parents to advocate to the best of our ability **for** children in our care the same way we'd advocate for our biological children? We are told to care for foster children in the same manner as biological children but then people pick and choose when that is applicable.

Over half the states have a similar law on their books and it has decreased the amount of time children are in the system. It doesn't slow the process. Quite the opposite. It allows foster parents the right to be part of the decision making process and gives us the opportunity to advocate for the child and the biological parents where appropriate. **I urge you to support HB 1155.**

Sincerely,  
Amy Seidel