

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB833
Foster Care Families Child Care Assistance Program and Fund
Judicial Committee

As a therapeutic foster parent, I strongly support SB833, which will provide child care assistance through subsidies and scholarships to eligible foster care families. Without it, it is becoming impossible to provide stable placements for special needs foster children.

My husband and I have been therapeutic foster parents for nearly 13 years. We have adopted 2 children out of foster care and have fostered a significant number of other children, primarily long term placements. When we were initially licensed, both my husband and I were working full time and needed full time child care. While I am now technically a stay at home mom, we still need child care for our foster placements because we have 7 children, ages 4 to 15, the majority of which have significant special needs. Running children to doctors and therapy appointments in addition to biological family visits is truly a full time job! Additionally, I run a food distribution organization that serves over 225 families a week, have my own small business, and host regular fellowship and support groups for other foster and adoptive families.

Cisco Center, a special needs pre-school and before/after/summer care center, has literally been our life line through our fostering journey. We have had at least one child there for the majority of the past 12 years. We currently have 2 children there. Without having access to this resource, we would not be able to sustain foster placements. When we started this journey, full time care at Cisco was equivalent to 75% of our monthly foster care stipend. While not ideal, we were able to make it work. Foster care stipends and child care costs have both increased. Full time care at Cisco Center is now 130% of our foster care stipend. This isn't Cisco Center's fault as the cost of everything has increased so dramatically. It does, however, create an unsustainable situation. We are not able to pay significantly more each month for child care than we receive for the full care of a foster child. Due to our long standing relationship with Cisco Center and local DSSs, we have been able to negotiate plans that provide our foster children what they need, but this should not be the struggle that it is.

While there are other child care assistance funds already available in the community, foster parents do not qualify for them. While there is funding for child care assistance within foster care, it is very limiting, and therapeutic (severe medical or mental health) foster parents do not qualify because their foster care stipend is higher. As already explained though, specialized child care cost is higher than the increased monthly stipend. It really is an unsustainable situation. Without HB1453 passing and relieving some of the financial burden on foster parents, foster parents are going to be forced to say no to placements that they might otherwise accept. This will perpetuate the already dire situation of not having enough qualified foster parents for the number of children in foster care.

I urge a favorable report on SB8333.

For more information, please contact
Melissa Kurzmiller
mkurzmiller@gmail.com

Melissa & Doug Kurzmiller