

Dear Esteemed Members of the Senate,

I am writing to you today on behalf of Senate Bill 311 regarding the opportunity for Foster Parents to form a union for the purpose of collective bargaining. When this idea was first brought forth to Senate Committee in 2013, I was able to testify in person. Unfortunately I will not be able to do so this time due to work obligations.

It is also unfortunate the concerns I had in 2013 remain valid and, in many ways, have gotten worse. Foster Parents are still treated (at best) as glorified babysitters, despite the specialized skills and immense time commitment required to begin to heal children in their care.

Foster Parents continue to quit, or fail to renew certification after the first two years, most often citing difficulties with DHS as the reason they leave.

Children in Foster Care continue to be shuttled from one home to another, where the Foster Parents are either ill equipped or ill informed (or both) about a child's needs.

The Foster Parents Bill of Rights, designed to protect Foster Parents from discrimination, is routinely ignored or even denied existence by anyone who chooses not to follow it.

Foster Parents are routinely prohibited from creating bonds with Birth Parents and improving the outcomes of the children in their care by inexperienced or overworked Caseworkers.

As a former Foster Parent, I can only say that I am tired of the status quo. I am tired of being told "we will do X and it will be better" or "we will do Y and it will be better." It is time for those of us who have already *done better* to stand up and fight for our own rights.

Unionization of Foster Parents will give us the power to advocate for the right conditions in which to foster: better training, better pay, and most importantly, better policies for the children in our care.

Sincerely,

Anne M. Lenzi