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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 741**

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**TO:** SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD  
**FROM:** JOEL WILLARD, FOSTER PARENT & BOARD MEMBER AT YOUTH, RIGHTS & JUSTICE  
**SUBJECT:** SUPPORT FOR SB 741  
**DATE:** APRIL 7, 2015

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Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee,

I am here to share my experience as a foster parent and why SB 741 will both help ensure that all adoptive resources are considered when reunification with birth parents is not possible and protect hard-earned, healthy attachments children form with their long-term caregivers.

My wife and I were first certified as foster parents in the county of Contra Costa, California. We were trained as Concurrent Caregivers entrusted to both care for a child in temporary care and prepare for adopting that child if reunification with the child's birth family did not occur. In this role, we were devoted to earning the trust necessary for children to form an attachment with a forever parent - whether those parents ended up being part of the child's birth family or myself and my wife. It was through this process that we were blessed to have my son Andrew join our family.

My family moved to Oregon in 2013 and, shortly thereafter, my wife and I completed the Foundations Training course to be certified as Foster Parents for the placement of a specific child. Working with state and local agencies in Oregon and Louisiana operating under the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children, we have been caring for this child since October 2014 with the goal of adoption if reunification with his birth parents is not possible.

For the following reasons, I urge you to support SB 741. Thank you for your time today.

- Trust & Attachment Are Job #1: My job as a foster parent and an adoptive parent are fundamentally the same. I must earn the trust of a child that has been traumatized not only by the neglect or abuse that resulted in her removal, but also by potentially losing every person, place or thing in her life that brings her security and comfort. The trauma of removal itself can be every bit as impactful as the harm a child suffers through neglect or abuse. Accordingly, ***the value of hard-earned, healthy attachments with long-term caregivers and the potential harm that can come from yet another disruption should be a part of any decision made in the best interests of a child.*** SB 741 helps ensure that the best interests of children determine the decisions that adults make about their lives.
- The More Qualified Adoptive Resources, The Better: There is no reason to exclude long-term caregivers from early consideration when making adoption decisions. Indeed, long-term caregivers should be considered early in the adoption process for many of the same reasons as biological family members. ***Both biological family members and foster parents have an existing relationship with the child and are therefore better poised to help the adopted child form healthy attachments and overcome past trauma.*** Indeed, there may be some instances where the child is more familiar with and attached to a foster parent than a distant relative. SB 741 helps ensure that children are placed in the best possible home to meet their unique needs by considering long-term caregivers as an option.