

FOSTER PARENTS TOGETHER (FPT)

Presentation for the Interim Senate Committee on Human Services

Scheduled for November 19, 2019

Written Testimony, Prepared and Submitted

by Mary Schoen-Clark, Facilitator of Foster Parents Together in Washington County

Graduate OSU Child and Family Development

Former Foster Parent

Adoptive Parent from Foster Care

Current Respite Care Provider

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Interim Senate Committee on Human Services:

I am a Graduate from Oregon State University in Early Childhood Development and I serve as Executive Director of a nonprofit housing organization in Portland.

I am also a Facilitator for Foster Parents Together. I assisted in starting this effort after reading and hearing hundreds of lived stories of pain, fear and disappointment caused by the system to those that offer the most to the children they serve – their hearts. It became clear to me that part of the solution to the issues we are currently experiencing in the system is to add the voice of the Foster Parents in as many ways as possible, and especially, to include their insights into the decision-making processes involving children and families involved with DHS Child Welfare and in the court system. We see and understand how the role of foster parents has deepened and there is a huge need and opportunity for "peer support" to address the needs of foster families, children, and young adults in transition. Foster parents' voice needs to be heard, valued, included and given due consideration in DHS meetings, in court sessions and in system-design and responsive program development meetings.

My husband and I have been foster parents in Oregon and Iowa. We fostered many and we adopted 3 children. Currently two of my adopted children, ages 18 and 20, years old, along with myself provide respite care to several foster families.

We adopted 3 of 10 siblings while living in Iowa and continued to be involved in one sibling's life after we were no longer his official foster parents. While he lived in residential treatment we would bring him home on weekends. The relationship was not officially supported by DHS we were in limbo status while he remained in care for almost three years. After he was adopted we were not allowed contact. When the child reached 18 he reached out and confirmed that the attachment that was broken between us and his siblings caused an emotional scar he will never recover from as he always considered us to be his true family. His story and similar ones have convinced me that there needs to be a more thoughtful path when transitioning children, especially those that were in care at a young age for over 6 months, and that it should be additive rather than the subtraction of caring adults from their lives, in all cases where it is possible. This will help to prevent or reduce the trauma of severing close attachments for the child and can create additional long-term supportive relationship.

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Also, I want to note that were it not for the provision of child care by the State of Iowa, we would not have been able to serve as foster and adoptive parents; like most households, both my husband and I worked. In Iowa the state provided full-time daycare and after-care for older children. No doubt, this increased the number of available foster homes.

I would like to close by saying my 20-year-old daughter would like nothing more than to become a foster parent herself when she turns 21. However, given the changes in the rules and processes regarding investigations and the lack of support and counsel for the foster parents, I cannot endorse the idea. I strongly encourage our State of Oregon to make Foster Parent legal support though insurance an eligible reimbursable cost.

#### Summary

- Items 1.9 & 1.22 - Improve the Receptivity and Inclusion of Foster Parent Voice in critical decision-making as articulated in the Oregon Foster Parent Bill of Rights enacted in Oregon Revised Statute ORS 418.648 on January 1, 2006
- Item 1.24 - Support the Establishment of an Independent Foster Parent Ombudsperson
- Item 1.13 - Improve Childcare Reimbursement
- Item 2.1 - Improve Legal Support of Foster Parents
- Reduce / Prevent trauma via additive rather than subtractive transitions

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary Schoen-Clark  
FPT Facilitator

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