

Testimony in Support of HB2337

February 6, 2019

Good afternoon, Chair Keny-Guyer and Committee Members:

My name is Alicia Bigelow. I am also a former, as of last Friday, foster parent, and do not plan on taking another placement due to how we were treated. I am writing today to testify in support of HB2337. This bill establishes a foster parent ombudsperson.

Foster parents have an important role and perspective from on-the-ground daily experience and need an elevated voice to be partners at the table for critical decisions, protected from retaliation, to speak to the child(ren)'s best interests. This was directly in violation in our recent experience.

Foster Parents Together has four (4) priorities at this time to:

- 1) 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
- 2) Support the Establishment of an Independent Foster Parent Ombudsperson
- 3) Improve Childcare Reimbursement
- 4) Improve Legal Support of Foster Parents

I see the passage of HB2337 as an important step in the process of beginning to give a voice to Foster Parents when things go wrong for children in the system. When procedures and policies are not followed, long-term damage can be eminent for the children. This is a system which by its nature is a purely human endeavor and as such mistakes are made which must be reviewed and corrected. Foster Parents welcome the opportunity to have a place to voice their concerns.

Every situation is unique and requires a thorough review as our littlest citizens are what is at stake. Our daughter was unnecessarily traumatized by the Foster Care system and as her foster parents for 2 of her 4 short years, and her 7th placement, we need to have a voice about how her case is handled in a transparent way. We have lived and taken care of her for 2 years and know her needs well.

Thank you for your time and consideration Sincerely, Alicia Bigelow, ND Naturopathic Physician and Former Foster Parent