

Testimony in Support of HB2337  
February 6th, 2019

Good Afternoon, Chair Keny-Guyer and Committee Member:

My name is Mandy Straus and I am a constituent from Polk County. My husband and I have been Foster Parents since 2014. We also chose to adopt one of the children that we fostered, who was abandoned by his Mother and was unable to be reunified with any of his biological family. Our heart and desire has always been to serve and provide a safe loving home for any child that comes into our home. I am unable to attend this afternoon but wanted to testify in support of HB2337. This bill establishes a foster parent ombudsperson.

I feel it is absolutely vital and crucial to have someone that is advocating and supporting us as Foster Parents. Currently we have zero voice at the table and we have no one that advocates or speaks up for us in this system. Our only support is from our local foster parent association and the support of other foster parents who walk and share in this journey. I speak from first hand experience of the backlash and retaliation that comes from being a voice for the children who we love and care for. I have been told multiple times that our role is not to advocate for the children in our home, that it is not my place or role as a foster parent even though I'm providing 24/7 love and care for their needs and truly know them better than anyone else at the table. I have experienced first hand the irrevocable consequences of advocating for the foster children that we love and care for and its left us brokenhearted and questioning if we can continue being foster parents. I believe this is a very critical time where the foster parents of Oregon need this foster parent ombudsmen now more than ever, or you will continue to lose great and amazing foster parents. We are risking so much as a family to step into this role and without support we cannot continue in this role. Foster parents are literally crying out for help right now and it seems to be falling on deaf ears. We need the support to be able to continue doing this volunteer role that we sacrificially and wholeheartedly do for the children we love. In order to safely advocate for these children without retaliation or threats of losing them from our home, we need to be supported and I believe this position would meet that need. These foster children are citizens of this State. They need to be valued and given every opportunity that you or my own biological children have. Please support us in this bill so that we can in turn support the children of our State. Not everyone can be a foster parent but everyone has an obligation to help protect and serve the children of Oregon. If you provide an Ombudsmen for Foster Parents you will definitely be helping to meet the needs of the children that are in the States foster care system. You can help us help the children and make a huge difference in the life of a child.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Mandy Straus  
Foster and Adoptive Parent