

Submitter: Kittee Custer

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services

Measure: SB548

As a lawyer, I represented children in foster care for over 20 years (now retired). Even when removal is necessary and welcomed by the children, it causes significant trauma in almost all cases. Often the children lose beloved pets, connections with extended family, school friends, even siblings. Sometimes their belongings are the only things they have left to connect them to their former lives. Having their possessions treated as garbage by using trash bags (convenient, cheap, impersonal, demeaning) reduces further their sense of self and worth. Astonishingly, only a handful of the hundreds of children I have represented asked about getting some of their possessions back. I believe this is because they feel helpless, hopeless, and completely powerless. They have no control over their lives. This simple, kind, and meaningful recognition of a child's right to be recognized as having status and control could mean the difference between abject fear, loss, and hopelessness and the sense of starting on a new life with at least some things that are important to the child, as well as recognition of the child as an individual. Many children move from foster home to foster home through no fault of their own, and being able to pack and keep their possessions as they move provides a small sense of stability for them.

These children are our future. Invest in them. Just a little investment now can make a tremendous difference at what may be the worst moment of their lives. I know many CPS workers have soft, cuddly stuffed animals for small children who are in trauma. Let's give them a dignified and personalized place to keep these and other precious possessions as they navigate the shipwreck of their parents' lives.