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HB23-1024

Oppose

Jody Britton on behalf of Foster Source

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Madame Chairwoman and Committee Members, thank you for your time.

My name is Jody Britton. I am the Service Coordinator for Foster Source, a non-profit agency serving foster and kinship caregivers throughout the state of CO. I am a former kinship provider and it is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. Michael, my kinship son's case went on for five years filled with lengthy litigation. Despite asking DHS for assistance multiple times, I received a single car seat and \$400 in gas cards. To add some context to this, I spent over \$19,000 in gas alone. I was told that the more help I asked for, the less the county would be able to provide.

I have appreciated the opportunity to work with ORPC to address some of our concerns, however, as it remains, we oppose HB23-1024.

Our first area of concern is the **exploitation** of relatives and kin. While we strongly agree that children should be placed with kin whenever safe and appropriate, we are witnessing, at alarming rates, the negative impacts on kin, children, and youth when crucial resources are not provided by the county. Often, children are placed with kin already on the brink of instability. We hear from our families that they were promised support but never receive it. Due to the demands of the department, kin providers are losing their jobs, facing eviction, and dealing with food insecurities. Kinship care is literally pushing families into poverty and often leading to disruption.

Federal legislation requires counties to place with kin whenever possible. What we need in Colorado are bills that truly support kin, not tie the hands of the County in presuming placement with kin without accountability or the financial means to support them. With no fiscal note or plan this bill falls short of its desired intent to "increase family resiliency through providing greater supports and protections for children placed with kin, including relatives". This bill is an unfunded mandate that holds the potential to crush the few of us serving kin. What's worse, it will crush kinship families and the children in their care. We **CANNOT** continue to ignore the economic analysis of kinship care.

Our second concern addresses the limitations placed on foster parent intervention and the diminished importance of a foster youth's attachment and bonding. There is no such thing as "ordinary bonding and attachment" for kids in care. If they are able to bond after enduring the trauma they have faced, it's nothing short of a miracle. Foster parents intervene for a myriad of reasons at various times throughout a case. If the desire behind this limitation is to "level the playing field", as we have heard is the case, I urge you to consider the most important player on the field - the child. WHOEVER is providing care for a foster child or youth has relevant and

timely information that needs to be heard - be it a foster parent or kin. It is a gross injustice to a child to silence ANYONE'S advocacy on their behalf. Children in care deserve and need their caregivers to be their voice at the exact moment needed. I beg of you, do not undo what our Supreme Court has decided is crucial to judges making appropriate decisions for children.

To claim that this bill provides greater support and protection for children placed with kin couldn't be further from the truth. This bill falls so very short of what kinship families need. What's worse, the bill diminishes the biggest needs that children in care deserve - **advocacy, stability, and security**.

On behalf of Foster Source, I am asking you, along with 53 concerned foster and kinship families to **vote no** on HB23-1024.

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