

## Colorado Safe Family Option for Parents: **HB-19-1142**

### Sponsors: **Representatives Kim Ransom and Jonathan Singer**

- **Goal:** To strengthen families by making available a community-based kinship-like support network for under resourced parents, giving them an option for vetted care for their children and support for their entire family in navigating a short-term crisis, thereby reducing social isolation and increasing community support, positive relationships, and both the immediate and long-term wellbeing of children and their families.
- **What the Bill Does:**
  - Provides that a parent may use the help of a non-profit organization with an established short-term care assistance program to find vetted caregivers that they can choose to engage through a power of attorney
  - Confirms that a temporary delegation of powers under the law does not deprive any parent or custodian of their rights with respect to the child
  - Confirms that the execution of a power of attorney does not constitute evidence of abuse, abandonment or neglect
  - Provides that the agent may not receive compensation for providing care for children under the POA
  - Clarifies that temporary care under a power of attorney is not foster care and that laws regarding licensure or regulation of foster care do not apply to the temporary care assistance program or volunteer short-term caregivers.
- **Need for the Legislation:**
  - In Colorado, a parent without social or financial resources should not have to choose between medical care, leaving their kids with an unwilling or unsafe acquaintance or family member, or losing custody to the foster care system in order to get the help they need, but this is an example of the current choices for some parents.
  - HB-19-1142 is designed to build community supports, allow parents access to vetted help, and ensure that more of Colorado's children grow up in safe, stable, supportive homes and environments.
  - Through HB-19-1142, communities are empowered to open their hearts and homes to families in need, and families experiencing crises are empowered to seek help and connect with a loving community of people who become like kin.
- **Key Impacts:**
  - Family Support and Stabilization
    - This bill recognizes that neglect can result from temporary life crises, like homelessness or medical needs that become overwhelming because a family lacks a supportive community to turn to for help
  - Child Welfare Deflection
    - By addressing short term needs, we prevent kids from unnecessarily ending up in the foster care system due to the family's lack of social and/or financial resources.
  - Child Maltreatment Prevention
    - Provides a family in crisis with a social safety net to address social isolation and other risk factors that could lead to abuse or neglect
- **Benefits to Colorado:**
  - Reduces County Human Service caseloads
    - Not all cases investigated by workers meet abuse and neglect definitions, though circumstances exist that could use the help of an organization like Safe Families for Children
    - In such situations, community social workers or case workers can refer the family to a community organization that provides family-strengthening and preservation services
    - Provides a valuable tool that workers can use to support families while freeing them up to focus on high-impact cases

- Reduces Entries to Foster Care
  - Early intervention and ongoing support from the community is the key to preventing abuse and neglect
  - By providing maltreatment prevention, HB-19-1142 and Safe Families for Children can reduce the number of children entering the foster care system
- Cost savings
  - Foster Care is expensive at an average of \$30,000 per child placed.
  - The avenue for parental assistance created by the bill is entirely voluntary, and services are provided at no cost to the state
- Stronger Families
  - Given the difficulties faced by families and children who enter foster care, and especially faced by children who age-out of the system, community support should be considered our first option.
  - Children who grow up in a stable family experience better outcomes socially, educationally, and economically. By providing support to families in need, the bill will help Colorado achieve the goal of ensuring that all children have the opportunity to grow up in a safe, loving, supported home.
  - Safe Families addresses the Protective Factors (an evidence-based set of criteria to promote the health and well-being of families): Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Concrete Support in Time of Need, and Social and Emotional Competence of Children
- **Safe Families for Children:**
  - HB-19-1142 is inspired by an international movement of compassion called Safe Families for Children
  - Founded in Chicago in 2003 as a way to mobilize the community to work together to build relationships between families that help prevent abuse and neglect and other issues caused or made worse by social isolation.
  - Safe Families recruits and trains volunteer “Host Families” who commit to providing temporary care for children, and emotional and practical support for families during times of crisis
  - Provides a family with relationships similar to close extended family or friends that they can turn to
  - Host Families receive full background checks (same as foster care, adoptive families, mentors, etc.)
    - Process includes training, in-home visits, and references
  - How it Works:
    - A family in crisis is connected to their local Safe Families chapter
    - The family is introduced to a thoroughly vetted and trained host family (or choice of families) that can provide temporary care for their children
    - Family has the choice to partner with host family through a temporary power of attorney that gives the host family limited rights to provide for the care of the children (i.e. school interaction, medical care)
    - Parents retain full legal and parental rights throughout the process, allowing them to revoke the power of attorney at any time and immediately be reunited with their children
    - Host Family provides care for children and support for the family as parents work to achieve stability
  - Currently operating in 40 States and over 120 locations
  - Parental rights legislation through power of attorney in 12 states.
  - 42,000 hosting arrangements nationally and many more in the UK and Kenya
  - Program is research-based and undergoing a randomized controlled trial and evidence basis evaluation.
- **Referring agencies:** Denver Health, Family Tree, Samaritan House, UC Hospital, Rose Medical Center, Catholic Charities, Tennyson Center, Nurse Family Partnership, Family Promise of Denver, The Gathering Place, Mile High United Way, Denver Crisis Walk-in Clinic, Denver Public Library, Salvation Army, multiple counties.