

Hello, my name is Lauren Smith and I am the Black Civic Engagement and Policy Manager for Elephant Circle and Soul 2 Soul 2 Sisters. I am testifying on behalf of these organizations in support of HB24-1031, Accessibility for Persons in Child Welfare Matters.

Elephant Circle is a birth justice organization focused on supporting people throughout the perinatal period. During our time serving the community, we have seen firsthand how the child welfare system can cause more harm than good to families. Oftentimes, we see CPS intervention occurring during the postpartum period, a crucial period where the interruption of a bond between parent and baby can have lasting, lifelong impacts. When there are no considerations for the harm of removing children, when parents don't know their rights, or when families do not have adequate support and information to navigate their CPS case, the child welfare system is deeply harmful. We are grateful that this bill is a start at addressing the latter.

Historically, CPS has overpoliced families of color, with the foundations and definitions of a healthy family based on white culture. The system frequently favors the interruption of family bonds or the removal of children over addressing the root causes that led to CPS intervention. Families experiencing language barriers are at an even higher risk of being harmed by CPS.

HB24-1031 is an important step in the right direction to supporting families navigating child welfare cases. Language accessibility is crucial, and it is also the bare minimum. Parents and children have the right to understand what is happening as they navigate their CPS case, regardless of whether they speak English or not. We believe that this bill is important and that we must also go further to ensure people have the information they need to navigate CPS intervention and keep their families together. We need to see progress in other types of accessibility, including improved accessibility for parents or children with disabilities. We also want to see deeper reform of the CPS system overall, the elimination of mandatory reporting that disrupts pathways of trust, and an end to state-sanctioned separation of Black and brown families. Please vote yes on HB24-1031.