

Thank you, members of the committee, for hearing my testimony on HB170.

Attachment 11

3-18-2019

I want to start by saying that as a former foster youth and current graduate student in the Master of Public Administration program at BSU, I am proud to call home to a state whose citizens and legislators have dedicated a significant amount of time and energy to improving the child welfare system. I truly hope that what I experienced as a child, no child has to experience and already I have seen great strides in our systems that make that more of a possibility.

Idaho's recent unanimous passing of SB1341, the Foster Care Improvement Act, boasted an effort of collaboration from major stakeholders and incorporated research and recommendations from the Office of Performance Evaluations. Among the changes made by this bill was the formulation of a Foster Care Legislative Oversight Committee. As I understand it, this committee will review cases brought forth by an independent citizen review panel, hosted by the Department of Public Health. Cases will be studied, trends noted and qualitative data passed on to the committee to inform future policies surrounding the child welfare system. It has been my understanding that this legislative committee is made up of professionals who have demonstrated a commitment to protecting Idaho's children and families' rights and who, most importantly, are willing to listen to those most effected by child abuse and neglect.

I was put under protective custody when I was three years old. I had bruises on my face and was so emaciated I could barely walk. My mother's boyfriend was severely abusing us and prevented my mother from feeding me. This went on for a period of four to five months. He often hit us with his gun and threatened to kill us both if we left. Fortunately, my mother came out of her drug induced state long enough to recognize, in her words, "If I don't get my baby out of here, she is going to die."

Luckily, I have very few memories from that time but I do have a copy of my records which include a police report and a statement from my three-year-old self describing the details of these events. From what I know to be true now, as adult, about domestic violence and the situations that surround violent child mortality, I honestly believe that if a social worker had shown up at that apartment when all this was going on and read that man his rights, I'd probably be dead right now.

My story and speculation aside, the Idaho state legislature has been both responsive and reactive in its approach to policy change in the interest of abused and neglected children and the rights those children and their families. HB170 is reactive, not supported by data or any of the organizations or institutions that I am aware of who work closely with situations such as these. They are complicated, wicked and sensitive issues that are not to be taken flippantly. Furthermore, HB170 completely undermines the progress and process established in the past two years by this legislature, at the expense of Idaho's taxpayers. If this bill passes it will not only be a great waste but it will hinder the prospect that Idaho could very well be a leader in the fields of prevention and effective response to child abuse and neglect and thus the health and prosperity of our state and country. I urge you to vote no on HB170 and I thank you for your continued attention and dedication to protecting children and families.

Signed,

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3/16/19