Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to amend HB 23-1024, *Relative and Kin Placement of a Child*. My name is Rebecca Cales. I am, and have been, a certified foster parent in Denver since 2018 – first through Denver County, and currently through Mount St. Vincent. I am committed to serving as a resource family for metro-area children and youth, and fully support the goal of reunification with biological parents or family, where possible and appropriate. I have had two (2) children in my care during this time: the first for just under two (2) years, before she was ultimately reunited with her biological mother; and the second since last fall. I am the fourth (4th) home that the current child has been placed with in under two (2) years. I am also a registered and active voter in CO Senate District 33 / House District 8.

I applaud the efforts of the legislature to enact measures to protect vulnerable children and youth, and to strengthen families. I think we can all agree that these are worthwhile goals, and that ***appropriate*** legislation can help provide the means for our systems to better reach these goals. However, **I believe this legislation misses the mark as written, and will result in unintended consequences for the very children and youth that it is meant to protect**. The law, as proposed, *significantly restricts* the ability of foster parents to intervene in a child welfare case – limiting the information that the court can consider in determining the best interest of the child, and limiting the ability for the foster family to access critical information that may be needed to help the child or youth. Colorado law, pursuant to 19-3-507(5)(a), *currently* allows foster parents to intervene after the child has been in their care for three (3) months. HB 23-1024 proposes to *restrict* foster parent intervention until a child is in their care for twelve (12) months (regardless of how long the child has been in foster care). This twelve-month restriction is inappropriate for multiple reasons:

1) Children under the age of 6 are subject to expedited time frames (EPP), in which a court must make a determination as to permanency for a child *within* twelve (12) months, *not after*. This restriction will prohibit a foster family from participating in any "permanent home" discussions;

2) Many children and youth, **such as the one currently in my care**, may be shuffled from home to home within the first months or even year of an open case. A twelve (12)-month restriction tied to the time a child is in a particular home restricts the ability of foster families to participate in permanency discussions – even if a case has been open for several months or years, simply because the child has recently been moved. This can result in unnecessary delays in permanency or stability (as well as additional trauma) for affected children or youth;

3) Important decisions about a child's case are made between six (6) and twelve (12) months in care;

4) Even in cases where a child is reunited with biological parents, moved to a kinship home, or otherwise moved to a new placement, foster parent intervention is generally not about *whether* a change of placement happens, but rather about *how* that change of placement occurs and ensuring that it is done in a way that is *least harmful* to the child;

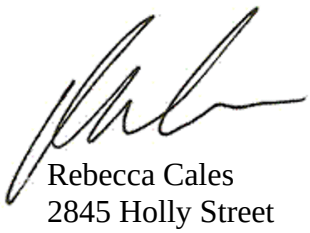
5) It has been shown that judges make the best decisions regarding the welfare of children and youth when they are provided the most information possible. This includes critical information from foster parents about the child's behaviors, attachments, and needs during out of home placement, transition home, etc. While these children/youth are in our care, *we are the expert*s on those children/youth and their behavior and needs. Intervention is the *only avenue* that foster parents have to introduce this evidence to the court; and

6) In Colorado, foster parents currently have the ***right*** to intervene after three (3) months. This threshold for intervention has been working. The change to a twelve (12)-month limit *drastically alters an existing right*, is overly restrictive, and does not make sense when relatives or kinship providers have the ability to intervene from the beginning of a case, regardless of their relationship with the child.

I speak from experience. The first child placed in my care was ultimately reunited with her biological mother. My intervention in that case allowed me to be an *active party* for transition planning activities to help ensure that the transition from my home, which the child had been in since she was two (2) years old, to her mom, was as seamless as possible, and that it was done in a way that minimized compounding trauma. It allowed me to share information directly with the court about the child's needs, to receive relevant case information, and to effectively advocate for the child's ongoing welfare – all which helps set up a biological parent for success after transition. *This kind of involvement ultimately makes families stronger.*

Although this bill has some great intent, **I urge you to amend the proposed restriction on foster parent intervention and replace it with a compromise of 6-months.**

Thank you for your time reviewing my testimony and considering these important issues.



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