

Good afternoon Chairman Clippinger and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Morgan Gable, and my wife and I reside in Upper Fells Point in Baltimore City (Chairman Clippinger's district). We have been foster parents for the last 19 months to the "most" adorable 6-year-old little boy in the world (we may be a bit biased).

I am writing to encourage you to support HB 893, which allows foster, pre-adoptive, and kinship parents a seat at the table in court.

Our foster son has had at least 15 court hearings over the past 19 months. We, as his foster parents, were not allowed to be a part of, listen to, or participate in any of them.

Can you imagine raising a child 24 hours/day and then being "shut out" of a hearing that directly affects the child's day-to-day life (in our home!)?

On many of these court days, we wait anxiously to hear from caseworkers to find out if anything major occurred—including whether or not our foster son is going back to his biological mother's house.

On more than one occasion, we waited, with our stomachs in knots, until 6 pm before reaching out to a caseworker for details about the hearing. Finally, around 8 pm, she got back to us and said that the hearing was cancelled and would be rescheduled.

Currently, Maryland foster and kinship parents are allowed to speak in court, but they cannot stay for hearings. They are regularly thrown out of court discussions about their foster children when they have valuable information to contribute. In addition, foster parents are not able to read court reports or other documents that would help them support the traumatized kids in their care.

Foster parents are the experts about their foster children. They spend every day with their foster children, talking to teachers, attending medical and therapy appointments, and dealing with behaviors caused by the trauma they have experienced. Many people do not realize that social workers are only required to see children once a month. The children's attorneys see them even less: about an hour every 6 months. Despite this, foster parents are not allowed to discuss the fate of foster children in court.

If HB 893 becomes law, foster parents cannot be kicked out of court, will be able to provide vital information regarding the health, safety, and best interests of the child to judges, and will be able to refute any incorrect information provided about the child in care.

More than 20 states already allow foster parents to intervene in court, including New York, Texas, California, Colorado, and more. This bill models the DC law, which allows foster parents to become part of the court process after a child has been in their home for a year.

Please contact Del. Kathleen Dumais, the bill's sponsor in the House of Delegates, and let her know you support HB 893

Thank you,

Morgan Gable
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