

Hello,

We are current foster parents in Baltimore City and are writing to submit our support for HB 893. As foster parents, it is important to provide safe, stable, and caring homes for the children in our care, but we are often challenged by the limited information we are provided by social workers and lawyers. We have cared for 8 children, and with each situation this bill would have allowed us to better care for the children in our home. It would not only allow us the opportunity to know what was happening in court, but also to convey observations of the children's teachers, therapists, doctors, and ourselves in order to help be a voice for the children who are often too young to appear in court themselves. We also believe strongly that this bill will help alleviate some of the trauma that children receive from being in the foster care system, and help families reunify with health and stability.

As one example, we had a child in our care who had already been through several traumatic removals, and had many triggers related to separation and abandonment, so we tried to emphasize to the social worker that the child would need time to prepare for transitioning out of our home. We were told the situation was moving slow and there would likely not be any changes to the case for a while. After an important court date, the social worker didn't tell us if any decisions had been made and didn't respond to any of our messages for a week. After a week, she gave me a 10-minute warning that she was picking the child up from school to reunify with family, per the court decision made a week prior. I left work, raced over to the school, and was able to give the child one last hug goodbye...my husband was in a work meeting and didn't even get to say goodbye over the phone. The worker stopped by our house a few days later to pick up the clothes, toys, and other items left behind after the rapid transition. Based on the child's triggers during his time with us, I'm sure that this transition, or rather lack thereof, contributed to his trauma. Had we, as the foster parents, been allowed to "have a seat at the table" in court, we would have been better equipped to prepare the child for the transition back home, advocate for a transition that was beneficial to the child, and alleviate the trauma of another whiplash removal.

We encourage you to support HB 893!

Thank you,  
Ben and Elizabeth Bigelow