

HB 893 Letter of Support

February 16, 2021

Dear Delegate Clippinger and members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am a current foster parent from Baltimore City. I am writing in full support of **HB 893**, which allows foster, pre-adoptive, and kinship parents a seat at the table in court.

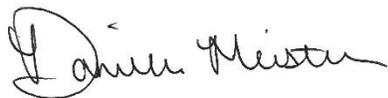
Over the course of the last 3 years of our foster son's case, we have experienced continued obstacles in being fully informed on the progress of his case and prevented from sharing information that would have helped the court in making determinations of permanency planning and ensuring that adequate services were being provided to the family. These obstacles have included:

- Not being notified with the required 10 days advance in writing of any court dates
- Not being allowed into the court hearing for part or all of the proceedings, and/or being discouraged from attending court hearings
- Not hearing the testimony and/or case plan updates from DSS, parent's attorneys, and child's attorney

We have learned after hearings that inaccurate or misleading testimony was provided to the court, and we did not have an opportunity in real-time to provide evidence to the court that possibly could have impacted permanency planning decisions. There are many times we could have immediately provided copies of emails, text messages, or other evidence that would have addressed significant problems related to our foster son's case – such as location/residential address of the parents, phone numbers of the parents, records of in-person and phone parental visitations, medical appointment histories, lack of services being provided to parents, and challenges with sibling visitations and service needs. We believe this has resulted in unnecessary delays and continuances in our foster son's case and challenges in his/our relationships with his family – ultimately extending the amount of time that he spends in foster care. This is particularly problematic as we have been expected and required to facilitate all visits and phone calls between our foster son, his parents, and his sister in foster care for the last two years. Communication between the parents and DSS is rare and we are the primary source of information and intermediary between all parties involved in the case. Having the full background and context of our foster son's case, a greater understanding of the parent's service plan/reunification plan, and ability to present evidence/information directly to the court would have helped us be better advocates for all involved.

I urge you to support HB 893.

Sincerely,



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