

Hi there! You will have to forgive me, I'm not a good writer... I'm a mom and a Maryland foster parent. I want to share my experience of not being heard and having my voice being dismissed immediately because I was not part of my kids' case. I am the foster parent type that wants to get to know the families I work with, be their ally, and cheerleader when possible. I offer ideas and find resources for the parents. I believe it's in the best interest of the child for everyone to work together, considering I spend the most time with these kids and in most cases their families too.

However, some social workers and lawyers use the letter of the law to shut me out when I have vital information to contribute. "I'm pressed for time today, busy day... I just need to note how the children are doing" "You can't be in this courtroom today as its for just people party to the case"

A sibling group consisting of a special needs child and his sister came into my care. Their mom was a single mom. She was actually a great mom however she had some significant medical issues and part of her issues was speaking and being able to understand someone who wasn't directly within a couple of feet of her and directly facing her. To someone only spending a few minutes at a time talking to her you would believe she was mentally handicapped. However if you took the time to write things down for her and talk a lot slower you would realize she was just the opposite. A warm, fully capable, and terribly misunderstood mom.

The CPS worker who pulled the kids into care truly believed Mom was incapable mentally to care for her children. That paired with her physical limitations CPS believed the kids would be safer in foster care. The case passed hands to a different social worker who was equally overworked and so spent very little time getting to know Mom. Mom was assigned a public attorney who also was not able to find time to meet with mom besides the 5 minutes before each court session.

I had the time to get to know Mom and figure out what communication method would work best. The main problem in court was everyone had to sit so far apart (traditional courtroom) and all things need to be spoken aloud for the court reporter. In that setting mom was unable to understand what was being said and she was not able to be understood and so court could not continue..

The court staff, DSS staff, and the attorneys postponed court due to not having a feasible way to work around this issue. After the first postponement I did some deep research in proper court methods of communication and found a system implemented in Baltimore county that would work for us. I tried numerous times to be heard by the dss workers, the attorneys and anyone who would listen to me. I was constantly shut down immediately as they legally could not talk to me about the case as it violates Mom's rights. I was simply trying to advocate for her to get her kids home much faster.

It took 7 months of constant postponements to figure out the proper way to communicate in court and for mom to win her children back. Those children could have been returned to their mom in less than 30 days had they not had to postpone court so many times until an official party to the case finally came up with the same answer I had discovered.

Please let foster parents have the option to be part of the team, the right to advocate for the kids and for their parents too. Thank you so much for your time.