

Representative Christy Perry

From: Brian
Sent: Thursday, February 11, 2016 10:38 PM
To: Representative Christy Perry
Cc:
Subject: Foster Care

Importance: High

Hon. Rep. Perry:

We spoke on the telephone last night and this is our story.

October 2008. My wife and I made the decision to get involved with the foster care program. We made a conscious decision not to have more biological children, but felt that adoption was a viable option. So, we went through the licensing process and training program; interested in long-term placements.

May of 2009. We obtained our foster care license, with our first placement being two girls age 5 and 13, Alexandra and Alyssa. The girls were from a rough home where methamphetamine was trafficked and Alyssa had been abused. From the first moment we had the girls, we knew that it was going to be a rough go, but we pushed through it. As the months passed, it became clear that the girls were not going back with the parents and were going to be candidates for adoption. During this time, we had become a family....blood relatives or not.

Through the court process, it became clear that IDHW was not interested in allowing us to adopt the kids and were actively working to place Alex and Alyssa elsewhere. During this time, Alyssa turned 14, and was given the opportunity to have input on her future; she made it clear she wanted to stay with us, as a family. However, the biological mother was going to Federal prison and was insistent that Alex be placed with her husband's brother in California. This "uncle" was someone that Alex had never met. As the court process continued, the Guardian ad litem, psychologist, court appointed attorney, and other biological family members all recommended that BOTH Alex and Alyssa be placed permanently with us. They believed that the kids needed to stay together, and since we (wife and I) had developed personal relationships with the kids' biological aunts and uncles, it was win-win for everyone involved.

We continued to fight the State of Idaho Health and Welfare on this issue, to include catching the IDHW attorney in an untruth in court; then having the kids' attorney notify the judge. The result? I was banned from all future court proceedings concerning the children. My wife was allowed to continue, however, I was not. Then IDHW came to my home and threatened to revoke our foster care license and take both Alex and Alyssa from us.

December 2009. At this point, we were working on permanent legal guardianship and/or adoption of Alyssa. We were stuck, and IDHW knew it. We had to make a choice, letting Alex be taken from us in order to keep Alyssa. We were crushed, and felt like the government had just run roughshod over us. Moreover, we had to explain to Alyssa that we had to quit fighting for Alex; and that she (Alyssa) was going to have to accept the fact that her sister was going to be placed with the "uncle" in California.

March 2010. Alexandra was placed with the family in California. Alyssa was given little to no opportunity to keep in contact with her sister. Phone calls on birthdays and holidays. The bright spot was that the uncle and his family spent time in Mexico during Christmas. The State of CA would not allow them to take Alex to Mexico, so we were able to take her during the break. Which was wonderful. Christmas 2010 was one we will not forget, as it was the last time we were together as a family.

September 2011. We completed the adoption of Alyssa. Both our children are our shining stars, I love them dearly. My daughter became a very strong woman and is just like her mother. She overcame a tremendous amount of adversity to

become a well-adjusted adult, and happy. Today, Alyssa is a dental hygienist for a dental surgeon in Las Vegas, NV. My wife and I are very proud of her.

October 2015. Alexandra had been adopted by the uncle a few years prior. Virtually all communication with Alex had ceased, as the uncle would not allow it. During October, Alyssa was notified by bio-family that Alex had been placed into foster care with different aunt. Alex had divulged that her new parent (uncle) had been sexually abusing her for the last 3+ years. In addition, Alex had sustained injuries consistent with this type of abuse. The State of CA acted immediately and placed her into a new foster home. As of today, Alex is in a safe environment and she is now able to visit with Alyssa on a more frequent basis. However, Alex has been significantly damaged by this process and will require a tremendous amount of therapy and love to overcome it.

This situation was wholly avoidable, if IDHW had just listened to those people that knew better. Alex would still be in a loving home, with safety, security and the means to be a well-adjusted child in Idaho. Instead, she is now a victim. A statistic. Just another child in the revolving foster care system. This story is sad and unacceptable, and it must change for future children.

I will tell you that being foster parents was a way for my wife and I to give back to our community. For many years, I have been responsible for removing children from a violent and/or unsafe home, placing them in the custody of IDHW in the hope the agency would do the right thing. In my person experience with IDHW, I now have no faith in the agency or the fact they will do the right thing for the children in their care. IDHW has become a bureaucracy of monstrous proportions and uses this to gain power and then leverage control over their foster parents and foster kids. The agency is a bully. My wife and I have discussed going back to being foster parents, we will not under the current system. IDHW must change its policies and behavior; become a champion for their children and parents (not a bully), listen to those with knowledge and experience, *then to the right thing*.

Thank you for your time and interest. My wife, Alyssa and I are sincerely encouraged by your crusade to help these children. I sincerely hope our story helps you in your quest for change within that agency....Godspeed.

Brian