

Hand-in!

SUMMARY OF "FOSTER CARE REFORM" PROPOSED LEGISLATION (2016)

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February 29, 2016

There seems to be a myth in some child welfare offices that attached children can be moved with the assumption that the future placement will be a reflection of the past. Every time we move children who show the courage to attach, we teach them that attachments are ultimately painful....¹

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare currently has an express, standard practice of choosing distant, out of state relatives for permanent placements for children in foster care over the child's long term foster care placement, regardless of the individual needs of the child and, most importantly, the child's attachment to foster caregivers. Relatives are selected as the permanent placement so long as the relative meets the State's definition of "fit and willing." No other permanent placement option will be considered unless any potential relative option is first "ruled out" under this standard, which is the minimal threshold of having a home study approved in the state in which the relative resides.

Because of this policy, foster children are often removed from what have become their families (and in many cases the only family they have ever known having been placed from birth), and placed with unknown "relatives." Foster families watch as their happy, thriving young foster children experience intense emotional and physical pain from the literal disappearance of their family – just as children who have been removed from abusive or neglectful homes. But in these cases, there was no abuse or neglect—just a State policy that a blood relative placement—no matter how remote—is "better in the long run." And these decisions run contrary to everything these foster parents have been trained about the best interests of children, and well established principles of attachment and trauma.

Foster families who then ask questions about these relative placements, or express disagreement with these decisions, are told that if they do not support the placement decision, the foster children will be removed from their home to a new foster home better able to "transition" the child into yet another home....Foster parents know well that such a move would cause even more trauma to these children. Foster parents become afraid and have no ability to advocate for the children because they are told they are "not a party to the child protection case," or regardless, the Department has "sole authority" over these decisions under Idaho law and there is nothing even the court can do to change to course of that child's future.

¹ Training of Dr. Deborah Gray for the Idaho Department of Health & Welfare on June 24, 2011, page 1. Dr. Gray is an author, educator, therapist and former foster parent, and a leader in the field of attachment and adoption. She is the founder of Nurturing Adoptions, and the author of *Attaching in Adoption, Practical Tools for Today's Parents* (2002; 2009) and *Nurturing Adoptions, Creating Resilience after Neglect and Trauma* (2007).

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ASFA requires that the state file a termination of parental rights within that time period. Continuing delay, even to grant biological parents extra chances, is destructive to the child.”

J. Kenny, PhD and L. Groves, MMFT, BONDING AND THE CASE FOR PERMANENCE, PREVENTING MENTAL ILLNESS, CRIME AND HOMELESSNESS, AMONG CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION (2010) (fn omitted).

More recently, “a description of the activities that a state has undertaken to **reduce the length of time children who have not attained 5 years of age are without a permanent family. . .**” was added to states’ 5-Year Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) reporting requirements that are necessary for the receipt of federal funding. Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act, P.L. 112-34 Section 101, 42 USC 622 (2011).²

The IDHW Concurrent Planning Standard recognizes the importance of these attachments and that there is a time frame within which relatives should be considered for permanent placements because of these attachments:

Relatives should be instructed that due to the bonds of attachment the child forms with their caregivers, it may not be found in the child’s best interest to change placement to a relative who shows interest in being a placement resource later on in a case. Relatives should be made aware that when relatives wait to come forward until it is clear that their relative child cannot return home, and the child is in another stable permanent resource placement, the Department might not consider the relative a possible placement resource as it may not be in the best interest of the child to place with his/her relative at that time.

Idaho Department of Health & Welfare, Concurrent Planning Standard (rev. 12/15).

Nonetheless, the Department rarely rejects a relative for permanent placement, regardless of the child’s attachments because of the “relative permanent placement preference” policy and practice. Biological parents have deadlines because they are in the best interest of the child; but in Idaho, distant and remote relatives are granted indefinite “rights” to the children.

² Notably, in the current CFSP for Idaho, the only description of an apparent ongoing activity to reduce time in care for children under five (5) years of age is the use of concurrent planning stating:

A concurrent plan is developed for all children who come into the custody of the Department. *Many infants are adopted by the family (both relatives and non-relatives) with whom they are placed at the time of removal.*

3. Idaho's practice of not allowing foster parents to meaningfully participate in permanency hearings violates a child's right to have the court consider foster parents' input in making permanency decisions.

ASFA also added the provision mandating that foster parents be "provided with notice of, and an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing to be held with respect to the child," 42 U.S.C. 675(5)(G). The purpose of the provision was the recognition that foster parents providing daily care for foster children are uniquely situated to provide the courts with information on the best interests of children in permanent planning decisions and otherwise. The implementing regulations defining "permanency hearing" expressly exclude any proceeding not "open to the participation of the foster parents" from the definition of a "permanency hearing":

Paper review, ex parte hearings, agreed orders, or other actions or hearings which are not open to the participation of the parents of the child, the child (if of appropriate age), the foster parents or preadoptive parents (if any) are not permanency hearings.

45 CFR 1355.20. Idaho's current practice of allowing foster parents to appear and speak regarding the status of the children in their care, but otherwise exclude them from the hearing, and deny them any relevant information about the placement options being considered, is inconsistent with the federal regulation defining a permanency hearing, and the child's rights to have the court consider the foster parents' input in permanency decisions.

4. Federal guidance regarding "relative placements" emphasize early engagement of relatives for foster care for better outcomes for children, not permanent placement in lieu of attachments to foster care-givers.

With regard to placing children with relatives, ASFA directs:

"Consider giving preference to an adult relative over a nonrelated caregiver when determining placement for a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all relevant State child protection standards." 42 U.S.C. Sec. 671(a)(19). Placement refers to placing a child in the home of an individual other than a parent or guardian or in a facility other than a youth services center.

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/majorfedlegis.pdf>

The term "placement" refers to foster care. All research and policy on "kinship care" refers to kinship foster care, which makes sense given the studies and the reasons that the outcomes for children placed in foster care with relatives would be better. This is not disputed. Families who are in a position to provide kinship foster care are more likely to have had a prior relationship with the child, or the child's parents, are supportive of reunification efforts with the parents and in local proximity which causes less disruption to the child and less trauma.

*Department's plan for the child.*³ Thus, when a foster parent questions whether a decision is in the best interest of the child they are caring for, they risk losing both the child and the possibility of the being an adoptive parent regardless of the individual circumstances of the child. There is no greater demonstration of abuse of power in our foster care system. This is a regular, unwritten practice and policy of the Department that under current Idaho law and practice, no individual – not the Guardians ad litem, foster parents, or courts, can prevent. The Department has no oversight in its decisions to move children under these circumstances, or otherwise, and foster parents have no means to object in court or provide information to the court on the decision to have a child moved.

The intent of the bill is to address these issues by asking the legislature to:

- Clarify that under Idaho law and consistent with federal law, the relative placement preference applies in foster care placement decisions early in the child's stay in foster care, and that permanent placement decisions always must be governed by the best interest of the child and consider the child's attached bonds.
- Clarify that under Idaho law and consistent with federal law, the Court has the duty and responsibility to pre-approve permanent placements both in and out of state as being in the best interest of the child.
- Clarify that under Idaho law and consistent with federal law, the Department's authority to consent to an adoption is subject to judicial approval as being in the best interest of the child.
- Create timeframes for the investigation of and notification of relatives for foster care placement to put an end to the current practice of giving relatives an indefinite grace period to come forward to be considered for placement and adoption.
- Clarify that under Idaho law and consistent with federal law, foster children have a right to have foster parents given fair notice of a hearing and the opportunity to be heard on the issues presented in the hearing.
- Recognize that moves in foster care create significant trauma to foster children with long-term consequences to the child's well-being, and clarify that under Idaho law that removal from a foster home must be shown to be for good cause, and in the best interest of the child, and give foster parents the right to be heard in court on the removal of a child from their home.

³ Case workers have justified the decision often by claiming the foster parent is "too attached" to the child, or the "bond with the child is too strong." Some states legislate specifically that a child may not be removed from a foster home on this basis.

February 29th, 2016

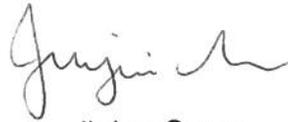
Letter of Support for Idaho Foster Care Reform Bill H0522

Hello,

I fully support the Idaho Foster Care Reform Bill H0522. My son was in the foster care system for 750 days. The circumstances that brought my son into care were heartbreaking, but seeing the decisions that were made on his behalf while he was in care for 750 were incredibly heartbreaking as well. We do not feel all of the decisions made in the Idaho Foster Care system are in the 'best interest of the child'. My son was exposed to continued trauma that, we feel, could have been avoided, and was absolutely in no way in his best interest. We did, in fact go on to adopt him, and we are still living with repercussions from decisions that were made for him. Thank you for hearing this bill and considering action to reform the Idaho Foster Care system so it can be better.

Our personal journey with the Idaho Foster Care system is enclosed in the packet of stories submitted. I have also attached a copy for your reference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Jinjue Serre', written in black ink.

Jinjue Serre

February 1, 2016

To: Those helping to bring change to the Idaho Foster Care system

Our foster son was brought to our home at 2 months old. We fostered him for 25 months. During this time, we worked with multiple visit techs and safety/case/adoption workers from the Department of Health and Welfare.

Communication with our case worker was almost none existent. Between visits, needing vouchers, signatures for medical care, court dates, not to mention checking on how the child is doing, communication is important. Over 90% of our phone calls/emails to our case worker were NEVER returned. I reported to calling and emailing the supervisor, of all those times, I only received one call back. How are we supposed to care for this child well, when we cannot even get a call returned from his case worker? Vouchers could take up to 4 weeks after we requested them, case worker didn't show up to a specialist Dr appointment we needed him at, and we couldn't get him on the phone. It is our understanding foster parents we can come to court and have a couple minutes to update the judge on how the child is doing. The first time we went, we sat in the hall waiting (after talking to case worker) and were never called in. According to our CASA worker, who was in court, case worker never told the judge we were there.

Our foster son's pediatrician was recommending treatments that we knew were not suitable (we have past medical experience with other children). It took 4 months of horrible care before our case worker would agree to let us change Dr's. Bio Mom never came to a Dr visit or had a special interest in staying at this particular Dr.

Visits that are hard. We understand the importance of visits, if reunification is going to happen, but by this time, when the visits were becoming traumatizing, neither parent were working their plan and the child had been in care for well over a year. Countless times I would get a phone call demanding I bring our foster son to the department within 15 minutes because Mom requested a visit. This would be after I was told visits would be on hold until parent met with the case worker due to 4-5 missed visits in a row. As our foster son got older and grew healthy attachments, when his Mom would have a visit he would be literally be torn from my arms, screaming. I asked that the visitation tech take him from me, as he transitioned from me to the tech better than me to bio mom, but my requests were denied and bio mom was brought with the tech when she came to pick up our foster son, causing undo stress for the child. This process can effect his attachments for years to come. After being in our family for 14 months, and meeting his bio dad, for the first time, for a 30 minute meeting, our foster son was forced to go to prison. He was taken to prison, by a social worker whom he had never met. The worker, who was a complete stranger to this 16 month old child, took him to a facility where he was patted down/searched and taken to visit a man whom he had no previous relationship with. This went on sporadically for 4 months. These visits caused trauma to this child that he couldn't voice, being 16-20 months old, but it was evident in his demeanor and emotional state. It is obviously traumatic to take a child away from his only consistent, safe place, but then add being taken by a person he has never met, in a car he's never been in, to a person he had no previous relationship with... it was no wonder that his behaviors were abnormal, aggressive and dramatic for 5-7 days after each visit. He would cling to me and not let me out of his sight, not sleep well, become paranoid, and scared of everything. Even others outside of our family (occupational therapists, friends who regularly see us) noticed the changes in him days after visits. I'll never forget when we had to get a rental car. As we approached the car and got in he started screaming in terror. He thought we were sending him away. Each time his case worker/permanency worker came for their monthly home visit, as soon as he saw them (once he learned how to say 'no') he would say 'no no no' and cling to me, afraid they were going to take him away.

Thank you for listening and helping us better the system for foster children in Idaho
Idaho Foster Family hoping to help make a change!

Idaho Foster Care Reform

2016

NOTE: Contained are some of the stories received in the past two weeks after creating the Facebook page Idaho Foster Care Reform. Many others who have foster children in their home or hope to foster in the future, declined to share their stories because of concern the Department would retaliate against them; instead they expressed their support for immediate reform to the system. Current and former caseworkers for the Department also expressed serious concern about the gap between current policy and practice, but chose to remain anonymous so as to not jeopardize their jobs. All identifying information has been removed from these stories to protect the identity of those involved in each situation. This packet does not include the more than 800 comments received by signers of the petition or the myriad comments of support and concern by current and former foster families, current and former foster children and professionals who deal with child counseling and attachment/bonding issues.

House Committee
Judiciary, Rules and Administration

My first foster children were two brothers ages 6 and 4 months. The baby was a mess when I got him. He had double ear infections, he slept in 45 min increments all day and all night and his formula was upsetting his stomach. It took me about two months to get his ears cleared up, change his formula, and get him on a regular sleeping and napping schedule. Once those things happened, he became a different child. He was happy and bubbly, rarely fussing and was progressing at the normal rates. This was the family's fourth time in foster care, though only the baby's first due to his age, but he had siblings older than him. I had him for approx 4 months at which time he was returned to his mother, even though both the prosecutor and the judge said that the department should have petitioned for termination. Fast forward 7 months and I got a call to take the baby back. I was not the first person called to take him, even though I should have been since I was his previous placement. I readily accepted and was given a very damaged little boy back. He was 14 months old and would cower when you tried to talk to him or if you made any sudden movement. He wouldn't make eye contact and would hunch his shoulders and suck on his fingers. He was barely walking. He was unable to eat with a spoon or drink from a sippy cup. After his time with me he has become a healthy, happy little boy.

I have had him 10 months now and I agreed to adopt him. When I agreed my case worker told me how excited she was that I had agreed to adopt him because there were no other options for him. She agreed at this time that keeping him with his siblings would be detrimental to his well-being. His siblings have an aunt that is willing to adopt them but she is not his biological aunt and has no desire to adopt him. The caseworker told me more than once that if the aunt wasn't able to take all 6 kids, I would be the next option for placement since there was no appropriate family. The siblings are, well, damaged because of the life they led and the way they have been bounced around. They were allowed to act like animals and when my foster son is with them he acts like one too. He has attached to me and calls me mama. He's healthy and happy. But even after being told that I could adopt him, the department is now changing their minds, against EVERY recommendation and saying that if the aunt doesn't want all 6 of them then they will adopt them all out together! They have told the aunt that if she doesn't want all 6, then she can't have any of them. So she has said that if she has to take all 6 to get the 4 she "wants" then she will, and she will just put my little boy and his little brother in foster care. She feels backed into a corner because the department is telling her all or nothing. This doesn't seem right, legal, or ethical that they can keep her from having the children that she is related to or that they can force her to take kids she doesn't want! My little boy sees his siblings once a week, he has no attachment to them.

I have contacted a high level administrator at the department and he told me he wanted to make policy changes and that he would check into my case. He did look into my case but then basically told me that he is just going to just keep an eye on it and make sure they are following proper procedures. He had my regional director call me. The regional director spouted department policy that it was best to keep siblings together. He also told me that the department are the professionals and they are the ones that get to make the decisions, a team of people from the department who have never even met my little boy get to make those decisions for him! It's ridiculous. He also told me that research is actually now showing that "kids are resilient" and that separating them from their caregivers doesn't actually have the effect on them that "we used to think it does" and that in fact, the fact that he formed an attachment to a care giver means he will be able to more easily form attachments to caregivers in the future!! Um, I've never read anything that says that! In fact, quite the opposite.

The department's own policy states "Relatives should be instructed that due to the bonds of attachment the child forms with their caregivers, it may not be found in the child's best interest to change placement to a relative who shows interest in being a placement resource later on in a case. They should be made aware that when relatives wait to come forward until it is clear that their relative child cannot return home, and the child is another stable, permanent resource placement, IDHW might not consider the relative as a possible placement resource as it may not be in the best interest of the child!"

When I asked him about this, he told me he was unfamiliar with the policy! The person making the decision for my child is unfamiliar with a department policy? I offered to send him the link to it but he didn't take me up on it. I don't know how this case will turn out as it is ongoing, but I fear that my little boy will be put up for adoption with his siblings, taken from the only mother he's really every attached to, and end up damaged because of it!!

I was asked by my daughter, who is a foster parent, to be present at meetings with Health & Welfare social workers at her home because she did not feel safe meeting with the workers alone and so she would have a witness to the Department's actions. The first meeting I observed was to discuss the permanency plan for the two foster kids in her home. My daughter had also asked the Guardian ad Litem to be present at this meeting. The first thing the

social workers did was tell the Guardian ad Litem that she could not be present and that she needed to leave. The Guardian ad Litem had been appointed by the Court to represent the children, yet was not allowed to be involved. It was obvious to me that the Department had their own agenda and was not interested in what anyone else had to say or what was in the best interest of the children. Because my daughter had been selected to adopt one of the children and had a signed adoption agreement, when the Department informed her that they had changed their mind and were looking at family, my daughter hired an attorney to attempt to intervene in the case. At this meeting, she was reprimanded because she had not told the Department she had hired an attorney, because they did not like being surprised in Court. I was appalled that these educated social workers could think that a foster parent had an obligation to tell them when they hired an attorney to go against what the Department was trying to do.

The next meeting I witnessed, the social workers were very accusatory. They reprimanded my daughter for the way staff at the daycare treated family who came to visit the children. They also made it clear that it was her fault that the Guardian ad Litem was fighting against the Department, and that she was responsible for some of the things that came out in Court. My daughter pointed out to them that she was never present at the daycare facility when family came to visit and they should take that up with the daycare provider. She also pointed out to them that she was not a party to the case and had no control over what the Guardian ad Litem did. The question was asked of the social workers what would happen if the out of state family were for some reason unable to adopt the child that my daughter had been approved to adopt. She was told that they would then have to start over and look for more family and that she would never be allowed to adopt the child that she had raised from birth. At the same time, she was told what a great job she had done raising the child.

During all of the meetings I witnessed, the social workers were very degrading towards the foster parent and were not willing to work with the foster parent for the best interest of the child.

Our family believes that children are the sole future of our world. Children who have experienced foster care, who currently reside in that care, and those who will yet experience it in their lifetime are innocent victims critically affected by the actions and decisions of the adults in their lives. This includes the actions and decisions of the Department of Health and Welfare. The current foster care system does not advocate for the best interest of children and in many circumstances cause more trauma to the very child they have been entrusted to protect. These children have no voice, some because of their age and others due to their lack of development and inability to express their feelings. I speak for those without a voice today.

Our foster daughter came to our home on [REDACTED]. She was 2 weeks old. She was taken from the only home and parents she had ever known on [REDACTED] – 22 ½ mo, 688 days after she came. The Department had ordered that she visit her grandmother in [REDACTED] for 10 days. She never returned.

This child was born into foster care, to a teen mother who herself was in the system. Her mother voluntarily terminated her parental rights after 4 months, before the biological father was identified. She terminated her rights because she wanted us to adopt her daughter. After 5 months and 4 different DNA tests the biological father was identified. Once he was released from jail, he spent the next 7 months unsuccessfully working towards getting custody of his daughter. During that year, our foster daughter became securely attached to our family.

During these 7 months, it was determined that our foster child was 1/64 Indian. When the Department Head of our office found this out she called me in, emphatically stating "I am part Native and it is my personal mission to return all native children to their tribes." Thus began the prejudice towards us as foster parents and the best interest of our foster child took second seat to her 1/64 Indian Heritage. The following is a brief description of events that took place in this case:

- Due to very limited contact with her biological family during the first 18 months, our foster child became firmly attached to our family, and recognized us as her mommy and daddy, brothers and sisters.

- During the second year of the case, the grandmother was denied foster care licensing as a kinship placement by the State of [REDACTED] 3 separate times, ultimately never being approved.
- There was no effort on the part of the Department to assist this child in creating a healthy bond with her grandmother before they abruptly removed her from our home. Transitions during visits were nil, months without contact, no photos or phone calls. For the second time in her young life, this little girl forced to abruptly leave the very person she was most attached too, creating further trauma in her life.
- The Department was vindictive and threatening to the CASA worker when she did not support their position and planning.
- We asked for the contact information for the tribe to send notes/logs of case history. The Department told us that we could not communicate with the tribe. We brought this issue before the court at a review hearing and the court advised that there was no law that prohibited the foster parents from communicating with the tribe and in fact the Tribe requested our communication.
- The Department ignored requests for a transition plan that would support the foster child through the transition. In the end, we, the Tribe, and the grandmother worked to develop a "child friendly" transition plan, only to have the Department terminate that plan with their abrupt removal.
- The Deputy Attorney General who was called in to assist the Department in a court proceeding intimidated the CASA witness in the hallway before the final court proceeding. This witness, a Child Mental Health Specialist employed by the Department was forced to turn to Human Resources for relief from the continued persecution of the Department after the case was concluded. She feared for her job because she disagreed with the Department's opinion.
- The Caseworker told me on several occasions that she did not agree with the case and transition planning, but had to do what her supervisor ordered her to do.

It is impossible to make a summary of these past 38 months in 3 minutes. However, in closing we would leave you with this fact.

In this case and many other cases, the Department's goal of reunification with the family is a statutory myth. This child never had a bond with her father, mother or grandmother. She only knew one family – Ours. Reunification could not have been accomplished. The law does not take into consideration circumstances when the child has no bond with any family member and the important primary bond is established with their foster family. In conclusion, more emphasis needs to be placed on what is best for CHILDREN in foster care. We need to minimize the amount of trauma that is added to their already complicated life and honor the attachments that they make to the very people, foster parents, who know them best by virtue of walking the fire of adversity beside them. I would like to leave you with a quote from a leading Child Trauma specialist, Bruce Perry:

"Although it's commonly believed that by the time we become adults we forget the trauma we experience as babies and toddlers, in fact the first thousand days of life may set the course of our health for the rest of our lives"

When the boys came to live with me they had already been in foster care for eight months. Their father was in prison for physically abusing their older brother, another brother had been permanently removed from the family for sexually abusing their sisters. In fact, all of the children had been sexually abused by members of their extended family. In spite of this, the boys were generally cheerful children, and they had been happy and comfortable in their first foster home. They were removed from that placement because of an accusation against their foster parents by their mother. The accusation was probably unfounded, but they were taken from that home with only a few hours' warning, and they were told at the time that the move was expected to be temporary. As a result of the move, the second grader changed schools – to his third school in three years. I took him to say goodbye to his teacher, but he missed the friends he had made in his old school for a long time. Although he loved his new teacher and spoke well of his classmates, it was months before he dropped his guard enough to make real friends. By the next fall, he was thrilled to have close friends to proudly invite to his birthday party. With stability and structure, this child who had been in the extended resource room a year before was able to access his amazing

potential and improve his academics so much that he was dismissed from special education. For the first time in his life he realized that he had talents and abilities, and he began to take pride in them. He learned what an engineer is and hoped to become one – the first time he'd ever dared to imagine a future.

While his brother moved to a new school, the preschooler remained at his previous school at his mother's insistence. This meant leaving the house at 6:30 in the morning so that he could catch the Head Start bus, as well as a move to a new after-school daycare. This little boy was so sweet and smart, but he *hated* the daycare. He cried every single morning for four months when he remembered that he had to go, but my repeated pleas to the case workers to consider a change in his interest fell on deaf ears. It wasn't until summer finally came and he could be home or go with his brother to our family sitter that he finally felt happy.

Both boys were wonderful, bright, good-natured children, but they came to me with a history of betrayal. The older boy was quieter, wary. He turned his anxiety inward and against himself. Early in their time with me, he pulled his own tooth out long before it was ready to come out, and for months he managed anxiety by picking at his skin or scratching himself. Changes in his routine led him to run to his room and hide under his blankets, and there were weeks when I had to change his sheets every morning because he had wet the bed. It took at least six months before he truly trusted that he could come to me and get the help he needed. The younger boy turned his stress outward. In the first months, he would burst into tears or fly into rages that seemed inexplicable. After many months of holding and hugging him through the tears and screams, he finally believed he was safe. Life settled into a calm, comfortable, loving routine.

Until the case workers decided that members of the extended family should adopt the boys.

Parental rights had been terminated a few months earlier, and the department had asked me if I would be willing to adopt the boys. They pointed out that the boys were thriving in my home, and the boys told case workers they wanted to stay there. Of course I was delighted to adopt them, and we all began to anticipate our futures together and talk about the things we would do. But after the boys had been in foster care for a year and a half, case workers convinced relatives to pursue adopting them. Although asked by case workers, these relatives refused to take in the boys when they were first removed from their home, and they refused again when they were removed from their first foster home, in spite of seeing them regularly at supervised visits. These relatives were also 70 and 75, meaning they will be close to 90 when the boys reach adulthood. Given their current health problems, however, it is unlikely they will live that long. I pointed out to social workers that they were nearly guaranteeing that these boys would face more losses, but they continued to pursue the relatives as adoptive parents and began unsupervised visits with them. During these visits the boys were exposed to extended family with severe emotional and behavioral problems, histories of perpetrating physical and sexual abuse, unsupervised contact with the parents who had lost custody of them, and unsupervised play in dangerous situations, including around firearms. The older boy began wetting his bed again. He began lying, and stealing. He became openly skeptical of all adults and their motivations. The younger boy's rages returned. He began to have nightmares about being kidnapped from our home by strange men. When I expressed concern about this to case workers, I was told that the nightmares and rages and sobbing fits were normal. I pointed out that none of those things were normal experiences for a 4-year-old, but case workers literally shrugged and told me that "biology is best".

Three days before Christmas, the boys were moved to their new home with their great-aunt and uncle. We celebrated the holiday together before they left, and on the day I packed boxes and boxes of toys and clothes and books – the accumulated evidence of our lives together – into a van and watched them drive away. The social workers who had forced that moment upon us weren't there to witness it, just like they weren't there when I told the boys it would happen, and held them as they sobbed.

It's been two years since they were placed with their relatives. They have attended at least two schools in that time. Because the relatives who adopted them move frequently, they will undoubtedly attend many more. Their potential will likely remain untapped – no one in the family has attended college, and the family's culture does not encourage achievement. The choice of an adoptive home was made entirely on the basis of a fairly distant biological relationship. "They always go back to their families, anyway," I was told. Meanwhile, their sisters were returned to their mother because, at ages 11 and 12, they were "basically old enough to raise themselves". When social workers say things like that, it's clear that decisions are being made because of misguided policies and not in the best interests of vulnerable children.

Thank you for sharing your story. I am so sorry that you had to go through that especially seeing that if we had done what you are doing back in February of 2015, you might not have gone through it as well. Our story is so similar to yours except that we were never Plan B. Our children had been in the foster care system for 18 months when we got a call from our adoption agency looking for an adoptive placement for a group of siblings. Parental rights were expected to be terminated within a few months and we would be officially selected as the adoptive family and be legal guardians of these children within a year. We were told there was a biological father of one of the children who had not been identified but that they were not planning to pursue that. After 9 months of having these children in our lives, parental rights were finally terminated and we were informed that the father had been found and his whole side of family needed to be researched. A relative came forward to adopt them and even though the case workers felt it was not an appropriate placement, they told us they needed to allow them to complete a home study. There was no deadline for when this home study needed to be completed. On top of that, we were told the department had decided they needed to try and reunite the children with other siblings who were in another pre-adopt family. Because of the immense needs of all of these children, they believed chances were slim that they would find a family capable of caring for all of them but that they were "required by law" to pursue that option. In February 2015, after almost a year and a half of bonding with these children, working with multiple therapists and counselors to help them attach to us, and treating them as our own children, the department decided to move them to another pre-adopt home.

Again, similar to your story, it wasn't THAT they moved them but HOW they moved them. There is much more to our story but the summary of it is that they picked up the children from their school and moved them to the other family without informing us. They told us to pack their stuff and bring it to the department. Our case workers acted in an unprofessional manner with us, the foster children and the other professionals involved in these children's lives on so many instances that I cannot even begin to write it here. The worst one being when they pulled our foster child out of class by herself, with no other supporting people around her, to tell her the traumatizing news that she was going to be moving to a new family. They then sent her back to class to continue learning with a hand written note of what the transition schedule would be. That is how fast the decision was made that she didn't even have time to type up a letter. (Again there were NO safety concerns.)

We also escalated the issue to the top of the department and had many meetings with several managers. They repeatedly told us there were no safety concerns in our home. They admitted to us that it was not handled appropriately and that changes had been made to their processes based on our case but that nothing could be done about our children at that point. We were allowed to see the children to say goodbye but have not been able to maintain contact with them. We don't know what they told the children or the new family about us and can only imagine that they feel abandoned by us and unloved which is the furthest thing from the truth. We decided not to fight the system as you are doing because we didn't want the children to have to move again. They had already been through so much and we didn't want them to be uprooted again, even if it was to be returned to us. The children have since been adopted so we feel it is time to speak out. We have stopped our fight to adopt and our only biological daughter will never have a sibling because of this situation. The only siblings she has ever known are out of her life and she is not even able to write them letters. As you can imagine, the emotional trauma this has caused our family has been immense. This affected not only our family but our family friends, classmates and their families, teachers, counselors; all of whose communication was cut off completely. The children were not given an opportunity to say goodbye to any of them and professional services they received while in our home were abruptly ended.

Changes need to be made immediately. The court system needs to have oversight. The judge in our case recommended that the department leave the children in our home and not pursue the other relative placement but they did it anyway. The judge told us she did not have jurisdiction to decide placement decisions but just that she was there to make sure the department did their due diligence in finding permanency for the children. I am a trained counselor who has helped many adults and children who are experiencing trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder but I did not know about the level of dysfunction within the foster care system until we became a foster family. I believe that most of the case workers are good people who get into this job to help children but they are

dealing with high stress, huge case loads and difficult situations. So many of them are dealing with secondary trauma and that is passed on to the foster parents and children on their case load. When our soldiers come back from war, they are evaluated by medical and mental health professionals to help them debrief and see if they are able to go back to the fighting. The same thing cannot be said about our foster care social workers. Most of them have only bachelor's level degrees. They need to be overseen by psychologists and evaluated on a regular basis. In addition to the changes you are recommending, there needs to be a protocol for informing children of traumatizing information. Transition recommendations from their own classes need to be followed, there needs to be oversight for case workers to make sure they are not too burnt out or having counter-transference issues and there needs to be more urgency in permanence. If changes are not made, it will be a disservice to all involved in the foster care system, but primarily the children.

My first foster children were two brothers ages 6 and 4 months. The baby was a mess when I got him. He had double ear infections, he slept in 45 min increments all day and all night and his formula was upsetting his stomach. It took me about two months to get his ears cleared up, change his formula, and get him on a regular sleeping and napping schedule. Once those things happened, he became a different child. He was happy and bubbly, rarely fussing and was progressing at the normal rates. This was the family's fourth time in foster care, though only the baby's first due to his age, but he had siblings older than him. I had him for approx 4 months at which time he was returned to his mother, even though both the prosecutor and the judge said that the department should have petitioned for termination. Fast forward 7 months and I got a call to take the baby back. I was not the first person called to take him, even though I should have been since I was his previous placement. I readily accepted and was given a very damaged little boy back. He was 14 months old and would cower when you tried to talk to him or if you made any sudden movement. He wouldn't make eye contact and would hunch his shoulders and suck on his fingers. He was barely walking. He was unable to eat with a spoon or drink from a sippy cup. I have had him 10 months now and I agreed to adopt him. His siblings have an aunt that is willing to adopt them but she is not his biological aunt and has no desire to adopt him. The caseworker told me more than once that if the aunt wasn't able to take all 6 kids, I would be the next option for placement since there was no appropriate family. The siblings are, well, damaged because of the life they led and the way they have been bounced around. They were allowed to act like animals and when my foster son is with them he acts like one too. He has attached to me and calls me mama. He's healthy and happy. But even after being told that I could adopt him, the department is now changing their minds, against EVERY recommendation and saying that if the aunt doesn't want all 6 of them then they will adopt them all out together! So they want to rip this boy away from the only actual mother he's ever known and thus cause attachment issues. He sees his siblings once a week. He doesn't know them and he isn't attached and yet the department insists that all the kids need to stay together! This is not in his best interest and the aunt is going to fight but I worry that he will be placed up for adoption and ruined because of someone at the department. The caseworker has'out right lied to all parties involved and yet the department turns a blind eye, even when she has been caught in the lie.

In between times that I had the baby boy I also has a little girl. She was 2 when I got her. She would growl and throw wild kicking, screaming tantrums, she would hide in the corner and she wouldn't interact with others nAfter a few months with me she got better and was doing well. She had been taken from mom who wasn't really working her case place. Once paternity was established, Dad entered the picture, having never met his daughter. He was content with once a week visits for 7 months! He never once expressed an interest in getting custody and the paternal grandparents refused to have anything to do with the child. When it became apparent that the mother was not going to get her back, the caseworker pled with me to consider adopting her as there was no appropriate family. I did not go into foster care to adopt and never wanted to. But the caseworker asked me to consider it. So I spent a great deal of time pondering it and decided I would. I informed the caseworker that. I would be willing to adopt and she was thrilled. Then suddenly, dad decides he's interested and paternal grandparents suddenly want to see her too. I believe the department pushed them into it. Dad was unfit. He didn't care about that little girl, he just didn't want to pay child support! He did not consider her well being. He refused to put her in speech therapy even

though it was recommended. I expressed numerous concerns to the caseworker and the guardian ad litem and was told the concerns were valid and they had similar concerns. I told the caseworker that perhaps we could suggest to dad that I adopt the little girl but let him continue to be as involved in her life as he wanted. That way I could take care of the day to day responsibilities and he could still see her. The caseworker told me that she couldn't suggest that to dad. Sadly, the little girl was returned to her father, despite the concerns, and has regressed. She is back to growling and throwing herself on the floor and she doesn't talk or interact with others.

The last one was a couple of months ago. I received two kids, ages 3 and 1 into my care because the previous foster mom was "sick" and unable to care for the kids. I was their 4th placement in 9 months!!! The caseworker coddled bio mom and did not make her take her any responsibility. When I expressed concerns, the kids were suddenly removed from my home and given back to the previous foster parents two weeks before mom was to get them back. I was told they were being moved because the caseworker was tired of me telling her she wasn't doing her job! The kids were bounced around because the caseworker didn't want me disagreeing with her!!!

I contacted my own representative and was met with sorry. In Idaho bio parents have all the rights and even if we wrote a bill to change that, it won't pass. That's it! He had no concern for what was going on.

It is sad that the department has all the power and it doesn't matter what anyone says. They do not act in the best interest of the children and don't listen to the people who do! They want foster parents to simply be babysitters and then hand over the kids whenever they are told. When you start fighting for the kids, you get in trouble.

Here is the update;

I've spoken with someone in high level administrative position within the department. He assures me that he wants to help and make policy changes and that he would look into my case. He has in fact looked into my case but basically said that he's just going to watch it and make sure the department is following correct procedures. The department is trying to force an aunt of the siblings who lives out of state (not a relative of my little boy) to take ALL of the kids, even though she has said that she doesn't want the younger two. She said though, that if they make her take the younger two to get the "ones she wants" then she will but she will just put the younger two (which includes my little boy) in foster care! I got a phone call today from my regional director who did nothing but spout department policy and tell me that research shows that siblings should remain together. He also informed me that research is showing that it actually doesn't have as big of an affect on these kids to separate them. Kids are resilient, he said, and if they attach to one care giver, then that helps them to more easily attach to another care giver!! This goes against everything we have been taught in PRIDE or any of the research I have read. He also let me know that the department are the "professionals" and therefore they are qualified to make decision about what is in the best interest of the child, even though they have never even met the kid!! So, the department's stance as of right now, is that it will be better for my little boy to sent to live with the aunt, or in an adoptive home, with all of his siblings, siblings that he doesn't know, and isn't attached to; siblings that have some major issues with behavior and emotions. He sees nothing wrong with placing an innocent child in a situation like this. It is so frustrating!!

My husband and I have been foster care parents since [REDACTED]. At that time, we received four (4) children, all siblings. We have known the mother of the children for twenty (20) years and therefore were considered "kinship". At first, we didn't have any problems with the department other than not receiving responses to emails and phone calls for day, even weeks (even though the department standard is 24 hours). However, our case worker went on maternity leave earlier than expected and we received a new case worker, [REDACTED]. All of our interactions with him and his supervisor have been negative. Immediately after he was assigned the case, the children began overnight visits with their birth mother. The case had been open two (2) weeks shy of a year when he took over and the children were still having twice weekly supervised visits with their birth mother. This was due to the fact that she had submitted multiple dirty UAs for methamphetamine and was not living in adequate housing. Each Sunday evening when the children came home from their visits, there were issues. The youngest child (whom

turned five (5) on Christmas) regressed due to the changes in their schedule. When she would come home, she would be covered in dried urine as well as the clothes she had worn at her mother's over the weekend. I reported it to our case worker, and he ignored the health issue. One weekend, three (3) out of the four (4) children came home with a rash all over their faces, arms, backs, and chests. Their mother refused to seek medical attention all weekend. I took them to the doctor the following morning and it was determined the rash was due to a severe case of bed bugs from their mother's home. I reported this to the case worker, and again he did nothing. The children then disclosed to us that there was physical abuse occurring in their mother's home. She lives with a transsexual who has three children of his/her own. Our foster children informed us that he/she gets angry with his/her sons and "chokes them and throws them on the floor really hard". The children also told us about a "game" they play with their mother in which they slap her as hard as they can in the face and then she slaps them in the face. This "game" was witnessed by the mother's sister and reported to us. I reported these concerns to the case worker, and again he did nothing. Despite the mother not completing multiple tasks on her case plan, the department chose to return the children to her. Per her case plan, she was to maintain housing and employment for a minimum of six (6) months. She obtained housing a few weeks before the year review hearing in [REDACTED] and at that time, still was not employed. The housing she is in is not sufficient as it is a 3-bedroom home of which she has one room and her roommate has the other. This leaves one (1) bedroom for her four (4) children and her roommate's three (3) children. The department determined this was adequate. She also does not have a driver's license due to failing to pay child support for her other two (2) children. When the department was questioned about this issue, they reported that they "don't care if she drives illegally with the children in the car" stating that it's a "poverty issue" rather than a safety concern. After all of this, the department asked us if we supported reunification. I responded that I did not support reunification at that time due to the fact that she had not completed the case plan created by the department when the kids were removed. Our case worker's supervisor then told me to "learn my place" and if I didn't, they would take the children away from us. Unfortunately, they chose to follow-through on their threat. A couple of days before our final court hearing in [REDACTED] to determine if extended home visits would be granted, the department called us and informed us that despite the ruling in court, the children would not return to our custody. They reported "we know you have created a great home and the kids are well taken care of. We know the kids love you and will be greatly traumatized if we remove them and split them up, but that's what we are going to do". When asked to explain why they were making that decision, their response was either silence, or to say "that's just what we decided". Despite all of the biological family members of the children, as well as the Guardian ad Litem, voicing their concerns with the children returning to their birth mother, the department chose to recommend it to the judge. They gave the Guardian ad Litem the options of either supporting extended home visits or supporting that the children be split up and sent to different foster homes. Therefore, the Guardian ad Litem had no choice but to support a return to the birth mother.

As being raised in foster care, living with several different families through out the years, there were good experiences, but then some very bad ones! I learned how to adjust to different aspects of life, as each family has different dynamics, expectation, food, ect.... Then on top of that, you always wonder how long you will be there. You learn not to keep anything as you cannot take much with you. The greatest desire is to be loved and accepted, no matter what, but so many of the foster parents do not know exactly what kind of behaviors they will have to deal with..... And instead of helping the child, they choose to move them out..... So as that result, the child learns once again not to trust.....,now years later, I have learned it is OK to have material things, I still have trust issues and relationship issues.

I did have a couple of families that wanted to adopt me....my birth mother and father refused to allow the adoption to happen.

The most important thing you could do for the children placed in foster care..... Is security!!! The only reason for a child to be moved out is abuse of any form! Never because the social worker decides that there is to much of a connection.... We need these kids to come out of a horrible situation as healthy, physically and mentally healthy adults!

I write this with a heavy heart. It is difficult to attempt to summarize my family's experience with the Idaho Foster Care System. We became foster parents three years ago. I worked full time at a Boise psychiatric hospital on the adolescent girl's unit. This was how I came to know about the problem in our society of teenage girls with behavioral and mental health issues having absolutely no where to go. I was astonished to discover that teenage girls were the most difficult to place in foster care. Basically, no one, not even foster families would take them. This became heavy on my heart and after discussing it with my husband we decided to become part of the solution. This was our motivation in becoming foster parents.

Subsequent our first placement of a seventeen year old girl we decided to go to work for a company called PATH. PATH foster parents are the highest level of foster care. It is a full time job that I became very passionate about. I gave up my job at the hospital and became a full time foster parent for up to two girls at a time. Throughout this time we had seven different girls placed with us from anywhere from a few days to permanently.

In [REDACTED] I met the sixteen year old girl that would change my life. My husband and I have three grown children and four grandchildren and had no intention whatsoever of adopting. This young lady who I will call Leilani, blew into our world with all of her behaviors, emotional turmoil, mental illnesses and the world's most beautiful laughter. and she stole our hearts. I went to every therapy session with her, every doctors appointment, every social worker meeting, every court hearing, (and there were many because she frequently broke the law by running away and stealing) yet through it all I saw how deeply she needed us. Her biological mother was given over five years to get her back and failed on all accounts. I remember her last hearing regarding this and she asked the judge if she could speak to me. She stated in front of everyone how grateful she was to have me as her "Mom". Leilani had run away six times. Each time she would assure the police that she had a wonderful home life but sometimes she just had to run. We understood and hung onto her. At one point my husband was rather burnt out from all the running away and two social workers sat in our living room and basically begged us to take her back. We did. I remember the social worker saying to me, "You wouldn't give up on your birth child would you?" We were submitted and approved as the adoptive family. We even had the judge chosen to do the adoption. Judge "O" in Caldwell who is a magnificent man.

The last 8 months or so we have had some marital issues. I know now that having a teenage girl with such issues can wear on a family. But that was ok, she was still our daughter to us. Regardless, at one point we were considering a separation and spoke openly about this to Leilani and the social worker. We were told the department of Health and Welfare would not take her from us. In [REDACTED] Leilani ran away again. A few days later I received a call from her social worker that Leilani was to be removed from our home. Apparently there had been a meeting which we were not invited to be a part of, and the decision was made. All that was told to me as a reason was that she had accused me of being a drug addict (I have 18 sobriety) and that my husband had warrants. Both of these accusations are easily enough checked out. However, I was instructed that when she came home I was to call him and he would move her to another home. I still remember the look on her face when she opened her bedroom door and asked, "Am I going to another home?" Instant despair.

Subsequent our foster daughter being removed, I called the social worker and was in tears. I stated, "You took my daughter." He replied rather indignantly, "You are not her mother. She is not your daughter. You are her therapeutic foster mother." I was devastated. My question to the department of health and welfare would be, "When do I become her mother? If you so easily dismiss us as her family, how is the foster child ever supposed to know that we are truly her parents and family?" Today this precious young lady is listed as an endangered run away. Although she has runaway multiple times, I hold the department responsible for her situation. Rather than make her face the natural consequences of lying about your parents (which many teenagers do), the social workers simply placed her in another home. She will be eighteen in August 2016 and will have no legal parents other than the state. I miss her everyday and I know that we are the only family that she has truly bonded with. In particular, her relationship with my husband, whom she calls 'Dad' is the saddest part of this. She has never known a father that would love her unconditionally and not abuse her. When the state took her she not only lost her parents, but also two sisters, a brother and three nephews and a niece who all adored her. There was no closure for us as a family. Once she was taken we were treated like some type of social untouchables without ever knowing why. We poured our time, money, emotional and mental energies into being her family and in one quick phone call it was all taken away.

I am a grandparent who is raising her grandson. My grandson went into the system 9-11-2014 and I've had him for most of his life, he was 6 months old and is now 35 months old.. We are currently in process of going to termination the end of this month. My son didn't do his case plan and the Mom is a drug user and is currently in jail for probation violation. The parents did agree to let my lawyer do an intervention and consented to me being my grandson's guardian, the judge signed off and gave me full and sole legal custody. Health and Welfare won't accept the judge's decision. Also at a cost of \$7000.00 so far. I used my 401k .

My husband and I have finally been approved to adopt our grandson, but we're not there yet. H&W want me to testify against my son and my grandson's mother in court at the trial. I don't want to do that but I do want to keep my grandson and I don't want him placed with somebody else. I have lived in fear the whole time we have been a foster parent that they will take our grandson away from us. Grandparents have no rights to their grandchildren. We have been to court many times and have never gotten to have our say to the judge, we have not had anyone truly represent our grandson in court, we see new faces every time we go to court ,how can new faces know what is best for my grandson? They are given the file and they just read what someone else reported. Even if the children have representation, what ever H&W recommends is what happens. No checks and balances in the courtroom and if there was H&W doesn't have to agree with them. How can they have so much power? I like being a foster parent, I love children and feel all children deserve a chance to a normal, loving table and safe family. My husband is afraid that this is going to take away our chances of getting our grandson for - Adoption. I so hope he is wrong.

When I was a young child, my mother was involved in a fatal car accident. With nowhere else to turn I was placed into the custody of Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, splitting up my siblings. As the years went by and the houses kept changing, I was left to wonder, why does this keep happening? Doesn't anyone care? With all these questions running through my mind and the continual change in locations, I was left to believe that I must be the reason for all this movement or relocations. While in the custody of IDHW, around age 16 I was placed into a foster home which was to be the location where I would "age out." While in this final home I was involved in a major car accident and suffered a severe brain injury. After months in the hospital and to my surprise, I was returned to the same foster home I was previously placed (the best thing to have happen) To make a very long and hard story a bit more bearable, I have firsthand knowledge and am the result of continual damage of being relocated and not having the security of being kept with a family, to build a family connection, to feel accepted and loved. The results are unbearable still to today, over 20 years later.

In the beginning of [REDACTED] we got a phone call from my daughter telling us about [REDACTED], he was born [REDACTED], which he is a cousin to our kids, [REDACTED] was removed from his mother and father [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], On [REDACTED] he was removed from the home and he was in foster care and had been taken out of one and put in another, we were told that he was in and out of the hospital, he got his leg broke and would we become foster parents, so my husband and I did all the necessary steps to become a kin foster family, the licensing agent came into our home and checked everything out, she asked us if we would like to bring in more children, at that time we did not, So on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] came to live with us.

In the beginning there were no visitation with the parents, then I took him to the health and welfare so he could have supervised 2 hour visits, It was a hit and miss with the mother showing up for visits, then one visit the police showed up and arrested them both, the mother [REDACTED] boyfriend bonded her out, however [REDACTED] is still in jail, the mom had moved into a 2 bedroom subsidized apartment with her boyfriend [REDACTED], who was only 17 at the time and was still living with his parents and 2 brothers and a sister and dogs, snakes and mice to feed the snakes, she started getting visits out there [REDACTED], he was picked up from our house at 11 and dropped back off at 2. It started getting harder and harder to see him go. He kicked and screamed not wanting to go. Then we found out she was pregnant again with her 6th child, then she got a monitored ankle bracelet from some of her

wrong doings with the law, So a woman hired by the state came to pick [REDACTED] up and drive him out to visit, this went on for 3 months while she was on house arrest. Then the state started giving her overnight visits, when he came back from his visits, he was filthy, not bathed, and starving. [REDACTED] canceled visits about every other week, then they all got kicked out of their apartment. They moved into approximately a 16ft camp trailer with no running water and a portable electric heater, there is only enough room to get to their bed that is a table or the couch. They have a basinet in there in front of the sink for the new baby [REDACTED], [REDACTED] sleeps on another bed, there is no room to play, he is now 19 months old, here he had his own room, lots of toys, lots of room to run, he had his own T V where he liked watching Mickey mouse clubhouse, Sesame street, Sid the science kid. We read books, we taught him everything he knows, We understand the state is for Unification, however how can the state and the social workers say this is a safe secure home?

[REDACTED] lost 3 older children, one of which is totally disabled, due to neglect. [REDACTED] parents adopted them, and moved to Oregon, they have tried everything to get [REDACTED] to live with them, there's another concern, they live in a single wide trailer with 3 adults and three children, they live off the money they receive for the children, neither on of them are working outside the home, the 4th child died in the hospital at birth. We have taken [REDACTED] to all the doctors appointments, which [REDACTED] was told about yet she showed no interest in attending any of them. Our biggest concern is for the children, it doesn't seem like a good living conditions, in the last 2 court sessions, the Social worker said the police were called out every week. Then she started getting 48 hour visits.

During the 14 1/2 months that [REDACTED] was with us we rarely saw a social worker. We had to constantly call her when we needed something. As for a Guardian ad litem, [REDACTED] did not get one until he was here for 6 months. We saw her twice at the house and then never saw her again. After numerous attempts to contact to contact her we were finally told that we had another one. We saw her one time and never heard from her again.

We don't understand how the State can say that the mother was doing everything that she needed to do. She never got a job, a stable safe home to live in, a secure environment. She lost her drivers license and still drives with the children in the vehicle. All she did was hook up with a teenage boy whose only source of income is McDonalds, and got pregnant for the sixth time in her life.

Why is it that the parents don't have to abide by the laws. Why is it that they don't have to take classes and meet the same criteria as the Foster parents do? Why is it that the State workers turn a blind eye to the necessary steps that parents should take to care for their children? Why is it that they minimize the concerns or Foster Parents? Where is the PRIDE?

We petitioned the Judge to allow us to adopt [REDACTED] and he told us there was nothing he could do without petitioning the State.

Our hearts are broken for this young bright boy.

My story begins [REDACTED]. I received a call from my son saying that they were removing his son from the home for alleged abuse. We were named as Code X foster parents and my grandson was brought to our house that evening. He was upset and scared. He wanted to go home to his daddy but I had to tell them that he was brought to our house and that daddy knows that he is there. At this time, I won't go into the details of the case but suffice it to say from the beginning I asked them to truly seek the truth because I could not believe that my son would abuse my child. To this day, I still firmly believe that and have seen nothing that changes my mind.

The next day, I had to take my grandson to CARES where I was completely in the dark again. When they finally called my grandson's name, I went to go back with him and the nurse held up her hand and said that they were just taking him to get his weight. He didn't come back for 30 minutes or so and I was told he was all done.

From there, there was confusion about where to take my grandson for daycare and what to do. At this time he was also having visitation with his mother as well. This went on and we just started to develop a routine when my grandson was removed from our home and visitation with his mother was stopped because of suspicious bruises again. It was determined that the marks may have come from daycare so he was removed from there.

I continued to press the social workers to seek the truth and then finally on August 12th with no notice, they removed my grandson from our home. I contacted the primary social worker about why and they couldn't really give me a reason. When pressed long enough they finally agreed that it could have been handled better and notice could have been given to allow for a smoother transition. My grandson became upset every time he had to switch homes when it was unplanned and he wasn't prepared. My husband and I were not allowed visitation with our grandson either. We were not told why and had no clue as to what was going on.

Late in September, we received a letter dated September 23, 2104 that on August 12th my husband and I were named in a referral of child neglect, abuse or abandonment. It was determined that the report was unsubstantiated. We had no idea that we had been investigated or why we were investigated.

I had reported my concerns and frustrations to Richard M. Armstrong's office on several occasions. While I did receive a call back, I was told that they would investigate but as usual, received no answers or information. Just the standard response that "Due to confidentiality laws, I am unable to provide you detailed information about the outcomes of the review without a written, notarized release, signed by both of the child's parents." My son tried to find out the outcome but received no information either.

I did meet one social worker who I really felt had the best interests of the child and our family at heart. She was present during some of the questions I asked of the social workers but because she tried to help us, she was shut out of discussions held inside of the H&W team. I thank her for her work.

I believe that our grandson was removed from our home because we continued to press them to look for the truth. We would ask for what policies and procedures that they followed. We got nothing. They would respond that they were just following judge's orders. I know for a fact that they led the judges and dictated how things would go. According to the judge's guide, the process is also supposed to be one judge for the entire process. This did not happen. In the beginning of this case, there were 3 different judges. The final judge stayed with the case until the end.

We went into foster care with the intent to adopt a child. We took our foster care classes and signed up in [REDACTED]. By October 25th, we had our first placement. The social worker told us that they usually want the child to reunite with the birth parent(s), but in this case that just wasn't going to happen. She told us we would be able to adopt this child once parental rights were terminated.

When they asked if we could take this child, we didn't hesitate. This was a young boy, 23 months old. It was my understanding that this child had been in just one foster home. However, I found there was at least one other foster home and maybe another one prior to that. Two to three home before they placed him with us for what we were told "A permanent-adoption placement". We had a couple of visits at the current foster home and then we were told to go ahead and take him home with us.

We were so excited to have this little boy into our family. We even had a baby shower for him with all out family and friends in attendance. We were told that the birth mom's rights would be terminated and they located the person listed as the father on the birth certificate, and he had terminated his rights. Within 4-5 months later, we were told that they weren't sure if we were going to be able to adopt him. They had located, who they thought was the birth father. DNA tests were done and it was found that he was in fact the birth father. Then we were told that even if the father decided not to take him, that his parents could possibly want to adopt him. We were told if they wanted him, they could have him. Months passed. Every day got a little harder, not knowing if he would truly be ours to adopt.

The Department of Health and Welfare set up a meeting with the grandparents and us. They were very nice people. They said they felt it was in this child's best interest to be adopted by us. As you could imagine, we were

relieved. They told us that neither birth parent was in a position to take care of him at that time in their life. They also felt since he had already been with us for about a year that it wouldn't be fair to him if he was taken from us.

Our road was cleared for adoption or so we thought. There were times that the social worker told us that she didn't know if the parents were going to terminate their rights. The department could have terminated their rights, but chose not to. Each time we asked about it, we were shunned by the department and especially by the social worker. Eventually the social worker "had it in for us" or at least that's how we felt. She would yell at me and say she never promised we could adopt him. She may not have promised anything, but she definitely told us from day one that we should be able to adopt him and even called it a "Foster-Adopt Placement" on the first phone call.

Month after month went by. Threats of removing him from our home continued. I fought back. It was like a rollercoaster of emotions. Once minute he was ours and the next he wasn't.

I was one of the fortunate ones that actually came out on top. After endless meetings with the department, the removal of the social worker, and me telling them I was going to the state senator and to the media, that it did happen.

Eight days shy of two years, my son was legally adopted.

We continued to do foster care. We had a certain age and stated only one foster child at a time. However, the department seemed to have a way of talking us into a different age and two at a time. We fostered about 20 kids in all.

When our foster children needed something, I would contact Health and Welfare. It was like pulling teeth to get anything for my kids. When I needed someone to sign for a doctor appointment or in some cases a hospital (ER) visit, they seemed very mad that they had to go in and sign. It clearly states foster parents cannot sign any forms, but the social workers would always say – "Go ahead, it's no big deal." Yes it is a big deal, it's against the rules.

When we asked if we could take the kids on vacation, we were told we couldn't take them out of state. So much for making them feel like they were a part of our family. However, trying to get the department to find a respite home for us so we could go on vacation was very hard. One time we were scheduled to fly out in the morning. We had submitted our respite care request about five months earlier. We finally got the respite care approval the night before we were to leave.

Once there was an instance where I heard a foster child screaming, not the scream from a child throwing a fit, but a child that was screaming in pain. I reported it to the department and I was told it was my issue, the child was fine, and not to worry about it. They never checked into it. That's when I had them pull my license.

My husband and I were naive (and too optimistic) in trying to adopt from the State of Idaho through foster care. I have a friend who adopted 10 years ago (2 kids from 2 different birth families), so I thought we could as well. I thought we would be helping a local child in need, instead of going to another country. When we applied, our adoption worker said "Oh, I wish I had your file six months ago! There was a little girl I couldn't find anyone to adopt". I heard news story after news story about kids in foster care needing adoption. We asked for a child up to 4 years old, so it's not like we were being too picky. I would call and check in once in awhile and was told "We'll keep you in mind" and every year, an adoption worker would come out to our house to update our home study. For 3 years we waited for that phone call that never came.

A year-and-a-half ago we added a foster care option because we thought foster parents were given an option to adopt if the child became available. Almost a year went by with still no phone calls. Finally, we were assigned a new

foster care licensing worker who actually added our name to the list of available foster families. **Our name had not been added when we got our foster care license.**

We got a few calls about foster care, but it never worked out. Usually because they make multiple calls to families for fostering and whoever calls back first gets the child. It felt like a competition or race with other families. In the summer there was a baby born to a mother who was unable to keep any of her babies due to mental health issues. All of her babies had been adopted. I was her mother for 24 hours and was sitting in the hospital rocking her when H&W called and said they'd discovered that the adoptive mother of one of her siblings still had a foster license, so they had to offer her to that family. They only discovered the other adoptive family after I questioned the social worker about where her siblings had ended up. **They had the file, but didn't look at it before making the foster care placement with us.** A nurse had to cut the hospital band off my wrist and consoled me until I was able to drive home. That baby will be adopted, just not by us.

Two weeks later our new social worker came out to the house to update our file and renew our license. She confessed to me that our file had just been collecting dust for 4 years. The new policy was for prospective adopting families to go through an adoption agency that H&W used. **Never once in the three previous home study updates had anyone told me that they no longer keep home studies for adoptive families.** She gave me the information for the adoption agency and left me in tears.

THAT AFTERNOON they called me about a 2 year old needing foster placement. I hadn't even finished processing what I had been told and I had this pressure to decide right then what to do. So, we agreed to take her in. It was like they said "Well, we better use them before they decide to quit being foster parents."

We spent the next month fostering her while also looking into adoption through H&W's agency. It became clear that wouldn't work either. The children available were all special needs who require placements where they are either the youngest child or the only child. As a family with other young children, we would never be chosen.

At the end of that month, we got another phone call about a newborn. Her mother had told the hospital that she didn't want the baby and "didn't want to leave a name". Although they warned me they would still have to "try and find out who she was", it was implied this baby would need an adoptive family. So of course we agreed to take her and expand our license to two children. Whether they lied or just didn't have the correct information, I don't know. But the truth was, the birth mom was still there in the hospital and had just not wanted to give the baby a name, not her own name.

We were ecstatic for a few hours. We even picked a name. Four years of pain and waiting seemed to melt away. Then H&W called back saying they now knew who the mother was and that it was now a normal foster care situation. I told the social worker I'd have to call my husband to see if we still wanted to take an additional foster child instead of a possible adoption. **Our social worker told me if I changed my mind now, that it would go in our file and "you'll be done with foster care. We won't bother calling you in the future".** I was given 10 minutes to call my husband and get back to them.

I'll never regret agreeing to foster the baby. We love her. But, we were absolutely manipulated into it. Her social worker gave us false hope again after she came home to us by being elusive in her answers about when she was moving. If she was moving. And, knowing that we were wanting to adopt, the social worker brought a "permanency worker" to our house. She never said anything concrete to make me believe we could keep the baby. But she never said anything concrete about her going somewhere else either. It was always "We don't know". We just had a "sliver of hope" as I told my family. **Ambiguity is the policy** and it left us devastated when she was moved to an out-of-state family member.

I know that our story is really about how we were failed as an adoptive and foster family, rather than how our foster children were failed. My point is, the department has a lack of regard for the families that it relies upon to care for children. **We were ignored, misinformed, lied to, manipulated, and abused.**

No matter how great of a foster family you are, no matter how much you care for children and want to help their biological families reunite with them, the Idaho Department of Health & Welfare will make it impossible for you to continue. It is an abusive relationship. They abuse the biological families, (who nobody listens to if they complain), they abuse the foster families, and they abuse the children. I am just grateful that our time with our foster babies was relatively short and that they themselves weren't subjected to the trauma I read about from other families.

I worked as a Para BI, in Idaho schools. My kid I was assigned age 12 was unable to care for themselves. They lived with their adoptive parents who were at an advanced age. They originally got the child as a foster. In another state. The child often came to school dirty and smelling of rotting formula. Often in a broken wheel chair that was not his and several sizes too small. After talk to the parents about it they claimed he was becoming too heavy and too hard for them to manage. They also claimed to be trying to get him a lift and that they did have a live in care provider that comes in for their respite. After this meeting the child was taken to the doctor for rashes and appearing to be in pain during feeding. This led to a surgery on his feeding port. Which became infected and was being rejected by the child's body. I called and wrote everything out for 1 month before the school finally decided to step in and call child services. They agreed to meet us and see the child. After this meeting, the parents were called and told to fix the rashes and get the child immediate medical care. With the promise of in house visit from Child Services. After the in home visit the parents were approved and even offered to foster a baby, because the foster care system is so overwhelmed. The lady assigned the child's case spoke to me about it when she came to check on the child a week later. After asking her how could they leave the child in that situation when it was clear the child was being neglected and even if the parents had good intentions they could not provide the proper care the child needed. She said, "The foster system in Idaho can't afford to take on a child with special needs. No one will want to take and would cost too much to care for the child through the state."

We loved being Foster Parents. We made the decision to focus on older sibling groups as that was one of the greatest needs. We had two siblings placed with us, while it was decided to place the third with another family. We were all told to place all three together would be overwhelming to one family. We developed a relationship with this other Foster family and coordinated all of the visits and relied on one another to watch kids as needed.

We put both siblings in counseling to deal with the issues that brought them to Foster Care. The youngest was willing to work with the counselor and was making progress that was exciting to his counselor and us. The oldest had no interest, but he went every week regardless.

Due to some problems with schoolwork and listening/respecting us we sat this child down and explained that grounding would occur unless they made an attempt to try to complete the missing assignments. Needless to say the grounding happened and the oldest child decided to threaten to hit me. It was explained that we don't allow that in our home and if it happened, the child would not be allowed to stay.

Oldest decided two days later to make good on this threat and was removed the same night, but not before causing physical damage to our home. We thought we were going to get to keep the youngest, but we received a call to drop the youngest off with the older sibling. The reason we were given is, siblings stay together.

But remember there is another sibling living with another Foster family. They were told no when they asked to take youngest that we had. This child would have been allowed to stay in the same school, the only school they have ever gone to and was thriving there.

The Department is blaming us for this child's violent outburst and we feel the oldest isn't going to be made to address any of their issues and the youngest is being punished for it. This child lives with a sibling who had no

problem resorting to violence and has said the older sibling scared them sometimes.

The school counselor, Social worker and Teacher and the siblings GAL were all advocating for us to get the youngest back. We wanted to adopt these kids and now we can't even see them.

We do feel like the department is going to go after us. Not once have we been asked how we are or how bad is the property damage. We've made the hard decision to put ourselves in the group of former Foster parents. We will not renew our license and our home will remain closed.

I have a long extensive history with the Department. I adopted two children from foster care who had been in 17 home by the time we got them, (they were 3 and 5). I also worked for the Department as a child protection case for seven years, and most recently I am a certified Adoption Professional and I do adoption home studies. At times I do homestudies for families who are adopting through Health and Welfare. I did a home study a few years ago for an adoption. The children were placed with "fictive kin". The maternal grandfather of the children, lived with a woman who was going to adopt. The grandfather had significant health issues and couldn't adopt the children. This couple, lets call them Mary and George had been married for years and in fact had two grown children. George was married to someone else after his marriage to Mary and had a daughter with the other woman. It was the children of this daughter that were the subject of the adoption. George and Mary were not currently married but were living together. The marriage between these two ended partly because of domestic violence issues and in fact, George and Mary both had a criminal histories with domestic violence as well as child protection cases when their own children were growing up. Now Mary is licensed to provide foster care for these children and George is living in the basement of the home. George is a vet and gets benefits and is contributing to the house hold income. He just had heart surgery and had recently been diagnosed with cancer, so he was terminal and it was unclear how long he had. When the children came into care they were placed with George and Mary and have been with them for about 18 months. I did the home study and was appalled. Frankly if these people had been a random couple looking to adopt they never would have been approved. They both had criminal backgrounds including domestic violence. They had prior child protection cases. The only source of income for Mary was George and the foster care payments. So essentially no income and she would rely on the subsidy to support the house hold. It was just not a good situation. I called the Adoption people in Boise and explained my concerns and said that I didn't feel like I could approve this woman for adoption. The adoption workers said they would get back to me. They called a few days later after speaking with the case worker. I was told to approve the adoption. Again I stated that I was not okay with approval, it was my name and my license on the line and I couldn't do it. So we finally agreed on how to word the recommendation, so that I didn't recommend this woman for adoption. It was basically stating that Mary was fictive kin, the children had been placed with her for two years, and she had an approved foster care home study and license and by her adopting these children they would remain with family. Unbelievable. I did that and the state signed off on my home study and on the adoption. On adoption day in November I was in court with several families to finalize adoptions and Mary was there, and the Department finalized her adoption on that day.

I have another family that I have completed two or three home studies for. They have adopted three girls and in the process through life, had six of their own children. This is an incredible family. They have a big home, a stay at home mom who home schools some of the children. The children have chores, and responsibilities. I have talked extensively with the girls they adopted. The girls are happy, well adjusted and have done very well. The parents, Sarah and Troy have done an incredible job with these girls. The girls are all off meds, and are very successful. The oldest one graduated from High school last spring and is attending college. Their own children are well behaved, nice kids. Some of the children want to go to public school and their parents are supportive of that. The ones in public school are excelling, good grades, good behavior, no issues. Troy and Sara are very young under 40 but are truly amazing parents. They have no criminal records, no history of

domestic violence, their references are glowing. They are active respected members of the community. These are people I would leave my own children with. Recently Sarah called me and said that they have been feeling like they are missing someone. They began looking at children in foster care and found a boy in Washington State. I updated their home study (which Health and Welfare signed off on by the way) and they began working with Washington to facilitate the adoption. The child "John" was involved in selecting Troy and Sarah and their family. They have been to Washington to meet with him, and he has been to Idaho a few times. These visits have all gone well and John did an extended visit with the family over Christmas. Every thing was planned to move forward, until Idaho Foster care got involved. Washington state required a home study done by the state. So we thought this would be simple, right. Use my already approved home study, the foster care worker do a home visit and they would be good to go. I got a call after the home visit from Sarah who was sobbing hysterically. She said that the worker came out, and basically said that there was no way they would approve anything, they already had too many children. The worker then went on to state that Troy and Sarah are basically young uneducated parents and they really shouldn't have any more children. It was a horrible experience for the entire family. Now again let me say these people have nine children, and John will make 10. There are not many people with that many children I would recommend for adoption, but these truly are wonderful people. It's an amazing family with the capacity to love and support all their kids. The children are loved and well cared for. They are being taught values, and manners. They have chores, help care for the animals and do school work. I honestly would leave my own children with them. But some social worker made a value judgement about this family and decided they can't adopt.

So compare the two families. Mary, criminal and child protection history, Sarah and Troy none, Mary-Child protection history, Troy and Sarah-None. Mary's children-in and out of detention as teens and jail as adults, Troy and Sarah's children-no criminal activity one in college. And the family the state approves to adopt is Mary. I wouldn't leave my cat with Mary (and I don't really like my cat most days!) Something is completely wrong here. Also, the state didn't seem to care that John has selected Troy and Sara and family, and formed a relationship with them. Nope they aren't approving the home study or the ICPC because Troy and Sarah have too many kids and are young parents.

In my opinion and having an insiders view, I believe that Health and Welfare have too much power. Every day they make and break families. They meet as a committee and decide where children will go and who they will live with. They basically get to create families. So I think they believe they are equal with the only person who can create families.....God! It's very scary when a small group of people have so much power over so many.

I don't care to remain anonymous, you may use my name any time, and can contact me any time. Please let me know how I can help and if there is something else I can do. I am so glad you are doing this. I have talked to Senator [REDACTED] about this and got no where with [REDACTED]. Thanks again, and I want to help anyway I can.

I wanted to share our story about the adoption/foster process concerning our fourth son. He is our second adoption through the department. There are also some references to the struggles of our 10 year old son due to his adoption story as some of the challenges overlap. Often times, when one child is triggered, it will set off the other son. This does not include at all the MANY challenges that my older two children have endured due to the fact that trauma affects the entire family. Trauma comes in many forms.

In [REDACTED] of [REDACTED] when our son was about nine months old, we received a call from the department inquiring if we would be interested in adopting a baby boy. After hearing a brief summary regarding the details of his case, we learned that he had been born meth affected and that at this time the long term challenges were not clear. We decided that we would in fact, love to adopt this little boy. At this time, we were already licensed foster parents and could easily transition a child into our home. As we waited to hear back from the department, the days turned into months and we weren't sure if or when this little boy would be joining our home. Five long months passed before we

were able to bring him into our home. By this time he was fourteen months old and becoming very bonded to his foster parents and his foster brother and sister. We were very nervous about this due to the fact that we had a previous adoption where our son was with his foster parents for sixteen months and was struggling with severe attachment issues. After our son joined our home, we worked very hard to help him with attachment while maintaining a bond to his now “aunt, uncle and cousins” who were previously just his “foster family”. Although this adoption went much more smoothly overall than our first, I have to question why he was allowed to remain in a foster care situation for five more months once a suitable, willing, and licensed home was found. In [redacted] of [redacted] he will have been with us for seven years. While he is a very well-adjusted child and has bonded to us as his parents and his three brothers, he is not without challenges that stem from the adoption process. As with our son, it is not uncommon for him to refuse to be away from me. I never know when his emotions will overwhelm him and he will feel that all too familiar anxiety that mama might not come back. Experiences outside of the home must be very thought out and regimented. What this looks like in “real life” is that the routine for transitioning to anything where I will not be present continually must always be made familiar and safe. This includes going to school in the mornings, trips to the grocery store, church attendance, the use of babysitters, etc. This does not include the challenges that most parents don’t have to consider, for instance a dental appointment can be very challenging until the practice proves to be safe, and predictable. This would not normally seem like a big deal, but to a child who deals with this kind of anxiety even going back to the dentist chair alone, or going into a grocery store is a big deal. There are always the questions of “will someone take me?” The door bell ringing at home can trigger anxiety and often full dysregulation accompanied by a significant meltdown as the child processes through the fear of who is coming to the house? Are they safe? Will they take me? What will I do if they hurt mama? There are also the concerns as a parent, that often these children are desensitized to “stranger danger” as they are taken by social workers, police, doctors, etc. as they come in to the care of the department and are having visitations. Having said this, it is not uncommon for one of my adopted boys to try to leave with anyone who tells him their name. To him, that translates to “I know this person since I know their name.” I have had to stay hyper-vigilant any time we are in a social setting. My other adopted son on the other hand is so fearful of the intentions and outcomes of being around strangers, even ones that mom and dad say are “safe and ok.” He will often become so deregulated that typically a rage ensues and it is not uncommon for him to have to take medication to completely calm him down. There are challenges with vacations, going to his brothers’ baseball games and just routine days at the park or the swimming pool. Trauma turns everything normal into a challenge both for the children and their caretakers. Nothing is simple or easy. You cannot just suddenly announce a surprise trip to ice cream because that will trigger anxiety. The child must know where we are going, how long will we be gone and the worst question “will we all be coming back home?” I could cite so many more daily challenges that exist in our home, but this has become our “normal” and while I would not change it for the world, I know we can do better. Not just for these kids but for our society that will be impacted for better or worse as these children either heal or sadly, end up taking their “hurts” out into society that continues to misunderstand the far reaching effects of childhood trauma.

It would be so simple to start this letter with all the factual information surrounding how RAD, or Reactive Attachment Disorder occurs and how it impacts the children involved. I want to give you a more personal look at what trauma actually does to a child, family and community. Eleven years ago, I was a younger mama with a four year old and a two year old. These two boys were our joy and they were best buddies. It was about this time that we decided to expand our family through adoption. Our little boys were so excited to learn they would be getting a new brother. With their young minds, they assumed a new baby brother would bring more of the fun and joy that they brought to each other. A new buddy to play with. As parents, we naively thought this would be the case as well.

We learned that our new son came into the Foster Care system at the age of ten weeks suffering from severe abuse that left him with a bone that had been purposely broken. By this time our son was approximately seventeen months old and very bonded to his foster parents. The Judge had just terminated parental rights and we would now be allowed to bring him to his forever home. So after fifteen months in foster care, he came home to us. We were

thrilled, our older boys were beyond excited. After six months we were anxious to be able to formally adopt him and give him our name and assure our older boys that we were going to be able to keep their baby brother. At this point he had now been in foster care for a total of twenty one months, as we were still not legally his parents. At this time, our first big surprise came in the form of notification from our caseworker that at the last minute, the birth mother had brought up the possibility of our son having some Native American heritage. This is where we became very familiar with ICWA – the Indian Child Welfare Act. So in a matter of days, we went from being so anxious to adopt our son to the very real possibility that he could be taken from our home due to the fact that we could not prove and Native American heritage was present in either myself or my husband. We waited almost another six months as tribe after tribe denied any interest in our son. Finally, after a twenty seven months in foster care, we were able to legally adopt our son. By this time he was approaching the age of three and it was becoming evident that his emerging behaviors once thought to just be the “terrible twos” were not going away. In fact, they were increasing and becoming at times frightening.

By the time he was three and a half, we sought help from the department. I contacted our case worker and explained to her what was going on and was told that he “must just not be sleeping” and to give him melatonin. We were also referred to Family Connections. After six months of in home counseling, parental support and Love and Logic training, the behaviors continued to escalate with no end in sight. We were desperate. Our two other boys grew increasingly estranged from their brother and were afraid to play with him. Once again, I reached out to the department requesting more intensive help. We started therapy and medication. All to no avail. By the time our son was five years old, he attacked me with the wooden closets rods designed to hold clothes. We again, sought help and his current therapist suggested residential. There are very few facilities that will accept a five year old. Another hurdle at that time was Medicaid, as they stated they do not pay for residential services for Idaho. I ended up in the emergency room at St. Alphonsus being questioned by CPS workers and talking about possible pediatric psych. hospital admittance. It was determined that due to his age, we would take him home with a prescription for a medication that melts on his tongue so he cannot spit it out and will sedate him when he rages. This was the first big crack in my armor. Continued weekly therapy and medication management seemed to do nothing. One time while driving to Grandma and Grandpa’s house, he assaulted me so bad in the car I had to pull into the parking lot at the grocery store and get my other three children out of the car for safety. It was freezing outside, but there was nothing I could do as he pulled my hair from behind and punched me in the face. Once free, I was able to call my husband and the police. By the time he was seven years old and in first grade, he had several physical altercations where he kicked and punched the principle, other kids, the special ed. Teacher and the continued physical abuse myself and my other children endured every time my son would rage. It was at this time that he committed his first felony against an officer, threatening to “take her gun and shoot her in the head.” I will never get the picture out of my mind of my tiny seven year old in hand cuffs. His wrists were so small, both arms fit in one side of the cuffs and left the other side to dangle behind him. My son is now ten years old. He has been let go by several therapists who all suggested residential for my son. I fought Medicaid, Optum, and more paperwork than I can remember to obtain these services for my son. This process took over a year. My son is currently in a specialized school setting with three teachers in a fully contained classroom. He has a minimum of three assault and battery charges within the first four months of the 2015-2016 school year. He has enough charges to be locked up for a year and a half. He was not with us the last two Christmases. The first one, he was in residential in Texas, the second one, he was in detention. We continue weekly therapy and monthly medication management, coupled with the ongoing services we are seeking through children’s mental health, and his bi-weekly parole visits and frequent court dates. I am not able to work due to the time involved in managing his care. My marriage has become at times, just managing our son’s rages, arrests and constant supervision. We cannot use babysitters, or leave him with very many people. Vacations and any change in routines is a sure recipe for a rage and anxiety. Our entire family now suffers from PTSD. My other children will need counseling to process all they have been though and had to give up. My boys who once used to be best buddies are now guarded to each other due to all the hurt and violence they have witnessed. They are embarrassed to have friends over in case they witness a rage. Our home has been vandalized by our son and our furniture has been destroyed by scissors, our animals have been hurt, and so far we have thousands of dollars in repairs to his room and furniture. He completely punched and kicked all the way through his bedroom door several times. Full sheets of drywall had to be replaced in his room as he punched and kicked holes

in the walls, and then urinated and defecated inside those holes and his heater vent in the floor of his room. These are just some of the very real things that we have endured in the last ten years due to this horrible thing called Reactive Attachment Disorder.

My name is [REDACTED], my husband and I have been foster parent for [REDACTED], we have welcomed [REDACTED] children into our home from respite care to emergency placements, and long term placements. These are a few of our stories. We would like to continue fostering, but at the same time our choices are to do whatever the workers tell us to do, or stop fostering. We also know if we stand up to the workers we risk losing the foster children in our home.

#1 When the twins were first placed with us at 9 months old, the Dept didn't know how long the children had been left in a single crib before the police found them. We had the babies for a year and 4 days before they went to their Grandmother for permanency. In this case, I do not want to argue whether or not the babies should have stayed as much as the awful transition the workers arranged. We knew the transition was pending, and we were waiting for the "ok" to move forward. The worker emailed us, said they would like to do a transition in the next month, she asked us to check our schedules and let her know what worked, we had also had a transition meeting about a month prior with Grandma, where we both stated, we didn't have specifics we as adults needed, as long as it was best for the twins. I received the email, and in the Skype visit that night (Grandma lived out of state) I told her that we had received an email to discuss dates that morning, so I asked her what worked for her. Grandma replied "Oh, the worker already sent us our plan tickets we will be there next weekend (10 days) to pick up the twins" After emails later with Grandma, we had discovered the Worker had not asked the Grandma either about the schedule, as the Grandma was in the middle of a remodel project..... So not only did Grandma end up with the twins abruptly, she also had new to her toddlers, in the middle of a house remodel and her husband would be out of town for work for 3 weeks. The worker had told us there would be a 4-7 day transition period during our transition meeting, but in reality, we had 1/2 day. Grandma flew into town late on a Friday, we had time together with them and the boys on Saturday, and their flight left very early Sunday morning. These boys, who knew us as mom and dad for a year, were passed off in one day, never to see us again. I believe if the workers had followed through with what they had told us- letting us pick the transition dates, as well as followed through with a 4-7 day transition plan it would have been better for the twins. When we buckled those boys in to their Grandmother's rental car, they looked so confused. They were 21 months old. I can only pray that they do not have lingering issues with abandonment, as they already had lost relationship with their birth parents, then they had their second parental relationship severed without a proper, and promised transition.

#2 Two days before Christmas 9 year old N arrived. She had originally come into care in [REDACTED], and had been living with a step mother on an extended home visit when it was decided she needed a safer home. Initially we were told it would be a 2 week respite situation..... it turned into 10.5 long months. Out of state family had already been contacted and working the ICPC paperwork. In the meantime N had weekly visits with her Grandfather, a [REDACTED] [REDACTED] the Dept was aware of, but insisted the family bond was more important than the risk. The safeguards put in place were that he had to do visits out in the community, and have another adult with him. 8 months into the case, birth mom found out which relative was going to be the permanent option for N, and birth mom was unhappy, this relative had adopted 2 of 3 previous children she had lost rights to. Birth mom insisted she would now start her case plan, 8 months late, and in the meantime tried to get her own mother to get certified to get N (in other words, she didn't want N, she just didn't want the other relative to adopt her) The worker supported birth mom, instead of pushing for early permanency. At the 12 month review, N wrote a letter to the judge stating she wanted to live with the out of state relative. Birth mom did not have place to live, or had been appropriate enough to obtain unsupervised visits- all conversation had to be within earshot of the visit tech. Even still, the worker asked for an extension for birth mom's case plan. At the 12 month point, this poor child, did not want to live with her mother, she had the strength to tell the Judge and had the opportunity to be moved to a relative, and be reunited with her sisters. Instead the worker dragged out the case, N was forced to remain unsettled for another 3 months, start another school she knew she wouldn't be able to attend a full school year at instead of being with her adoptive

placement and start the bonding, and attachment necessary to her healing. Every time we went to court and the Judge and Worker agreed to continue working with birth mom, N's heart would be crushed. All she wanted was to be with the family that wanted her.

#3 T came to us in [REDACTED], he is 2.5 years old, and we are his 4th foster home and he has been in Foster Care for 2 years. A year ago DHW decided to terminate the Parental Rights of his parents. A permanent home has yet to be selected for T, they are still searching for a relative placement for T. Three times the Dept. has had scheduled TPR Trial dates in [REDACTED], none of which proceeded for different reasons. In the meantime, there is no end game plan for T to get a family. There is no guarantee the Judge will proceed with the next TPR trial, there is no set date for a selection committee to pick out an adoptive home (relative or non-relative) for T, there is no deadline the Dept is holding to stop searching for a relative placement and seek out an adoptive home so T can have a family. So we wait and see. We are willing to be an adoptive placement for T and although we understand the relative placement policy, how long will they search before saying this child's need for a family now, for attachment now, for his healing now, is more important?

I was placed with FOSTER SON at two days old [REDACTED]. He tested positive for methamphetamine. FOSTER SON's biological mom was inconsistent in her visits. After only four or five visits in his first five months she disappeared. FOSTER SON was not a typical foster. He did not leave our home several times a week for visits. FOSTER SON had a handful of visits with his biological father in [REDACTED] before he decided he did not want to pursue reunification. During his first year the department looked into family placements in [REDACTED] (another state) (maternal) and [REDACTED] (another state) (paternal). I had contact via email, phone and in person visits with FOSTER SON's aunt in [REDACTED] who decided not to pursue adoption of FOSTER SON because he already had a strong attachment with our family. In late [REDACTED], early [REDACTED] I was informed by the department the Aunt in [REDACTED] did not want to adopt FOSTER SON. In [REDACTED] FOSTER SON's half sister was born and placed with our family, she also tested positive for methamphetamine. FOSTER SON and FOSTER DAUGHTER are 12 months and 3 weeks apart in age. There was an immediate and intense bond between these two babies. [REDACTED] also brought termination of parental rights in FOSTER SON's case and an adoption committee meeting was held to select our family for adoption. In [REDACTED] I received a phone call from the department that FOSTER SON was possibly Native American and we would now have to wait to hear from the Indian tribes before proceeding with his adoption. They also informed me they had contacted the Aunt in [REDACTED] and was told she now wanted to pursue adoption of FOSTER SON. At this point, FOSTER SON was 17 months old and had only known one family and one mother. He was completely bonded and attached to our family including my son, Brody as his sibling, and our extended family. One week later the department called and said central office had decided they would not allow the family in [REDACTED] to complete an ICPC as FOSTER SON's adoption selection had already been complete and he had been in one family for his entire life. In [REDACTED] on a conference call with several department workers I was informed the department had changed their minds and was requesting an ICPC from FOSTER SON's aunt in [REDACTED]. I was told there was no avenue to fight this decision. At this time FOSTER SON was 19 months old and had never had any contact with this family. One week later FOSTER SON and FOSTER DAUGHTER were removed from my home and placed for two months with another amazing foster mom. During our separation FOSTER SON stopped talking and signing. He was sad, anxious and confused and tried to self soothe with food. He often moaned and cried when with others. Upon their return to my home [REDACTED] FOSTER SON quickly returned to his happy self. The department funded four trips to Boise for FOSTER SON's Aunt. Every visit created more stress for FOSTER SON, especially when the department would restrict all contact between FOSTER SON and our family, and insisted we start calling him [REDACTED] (another name). FOSTER SON became physically ill during or after each visit. In late [REDACTED] I was told FOSTER SON would be moving to [REDACTED] before Christmas. The department created a short five-day transition between FOSTER SON's only home and family he had ever known and a hotel room with his Aunt. During Skype visits he has asked to come home. He asks repeatedly for FOSTER DAUGHTER, Brody, Grandma and other family members. He has gone from testing out of the infant toddler program to weekly speech therapy due to regression from the trauma caused by removing him from his family. FOSTER SON has no

contact with his maternal biological family and the department no longer requires the aunt to continue contact between FOSTER SON and Brody and I, his family since birth.

The date you received the child. How long the child remained with you? - We were called by our social worker on [REDACTED] to take him in at the age of 1 day. Child was in the hospital where we visited each day until he was able to come home with us at 9 days old. He stayed with us until one month before his second birthday.

The date the child was removed from your home. - He remained in our home until [REDACTED], when the department gave us 3 hours to deliver him to his "new family". We then drove him to H&W in CDA where we delivered him to complete strangers and were given one hour to give the new family information about "our baby" and then were asked to leave.

The reason the department gave for removing the child. - The department told us that another family had been chosen to adopt him at the adoption selection committee. One month prior to the adoption selection committee meeting we attended his parental termination hearing and were asked under oath if it was our intention to adopt him. This was absolutely our intention and our understanding as we moved forward. This was also the plan the department had given us.

Did you receive the child back into your care? If so, why? If not, why not? Yes, we received the child back in our care exactly one day short of 6 months later. We were told the other family were having personal issues and were unable to continue with adoption. Moving him back into our home was not what we expected. During the time he was gone we filed motions to have him returned, we went to the media including several radio stations, 3 local newspapers and a local television station. During this time the department was given a gag order and both the department and CASA refused to talk to us. We were also turned away several times when trying to renew our home study.

Are you aware of any repercussions that have come to the child because of the actions of the department. - He suffers ADHD, PTSD, and RAD, all of which come with many repercussions of their own. [REDACTED] struggles at school and socially.

Where is the child today? Is there any information about the child that would help us understand how they have been affected? - He is in our home since the other family gave him back to the department, although the other family was unaware he would be moved back into our home. Attached testing and plan from counselor.

We got a call from the Department of Health and Welfare when FOSTER SON was about two weeks old. They informed us that he was in the NICU and born addicted to drugs. For the next two and half weeks we visited the NICU every day spending hours holding and helping him feel nurtured and safe. The nurses were astounded at how quickly he began to show improvement. "All he needed was a little love," they told us. Home health nurses would visit our home the next few months of his life monitoring his progress. They credited his rapid recovery to a safe, loving, and nurturing home. We felt good about the service we were able to render this little boy. FOSTER SON made a full recovery and within two weeks after coming to our home was off the drug-weaning medication.

Early on it was reported to us that an out of town relative had been selected to adopt FOSTER SON in the event that his mom's rights were terminated. While we would have loved to adopt FOSTER SON, we were in support of the relative. We facilitated multiple skype visits each week as well as monthly visits when the relative would come into town.

While FOSTER SON was an infant, these week -long visits at the hotel worked well. As the child got older he began to return from these visits more and more disturbed and aggressive. We reported these reactions to the caseworker with the hope that a modification to the visits would be explored to better ease FOSTER SON through the transition process. The department ignored our request and concerns. After firmly stating the need for them to evaluate how they were conducting the visits our case -worker threatened to remove FOSTER SON from our home if we couldn't support the department's decisions. We felt alarmed that the department was unwilling to make minor adjustments to accommodate FOSTER SON's changing needs.

Shortly afterwards, when FOSTER SON was 14 months old he went to his usual visit with his birth mom. When we said goodbye to him that morning we had no idea the grief we would experience that day. At the time he should have returned from his visit we were informed that he would not be returning to our home but was to be placed in another foster home. We were sick inside. Sick for what FOSTER SON was thinking. Where was he? Was he scared? Was he confused? Did he think that we did not care about him? What was going through his mind? These questions haunted us. While he was not our literal son, we felt as much concern for him as we would one of our own children.

After 14 months of living with the people he believed to be family, the department knowingly, purposefully, and premeditatively severed that bond. We found out later, that a week before they removed FOSTER SON from our home, a group of supervisors met and decided to remove him without any notice to us, the birth mom, or the guardian. They did that knowing full well, in violation of their own research and internal protocols, how devastating it is on a child to have those bonds disrupted.

From the Idaho Child Protection manual it states, "We now know that multiple moves can break the bonds of trust and attachment formed by the child. Consequently, mutiple moves harm the child. Multiple moves compound the original trauma of abuse and neglect, often leading to long term adjustment and attachment difficulties." And knowing all this, they removed FOSTER SON to another foster home.

In the months following, the reasons they gave for taking FOSTER SON from our home changed many times. We met with the department after this decision pleading with them to place the child back in our home for FOSTER SON's own sake, which they rejected. Through facebook the new foster mom contacted me wondering how to care for FOSTER SON and his special needs. She shared how he was feeling and doing and described a boy that we did not recognize; inward, sad, empty, sullen, withdrawn. Those words did not describe the boy we knew. FOSTER SON was vibrant, cheery, goofy, fun loving, happy and excited about life. Everyone that knew him called him the happiest baby they had ever seen. He was always smiling and full of energy.

Even though the department has removed FOSTER SON from our home, FOSTER SON still feels and thinks that we're his family. It is the height of arrogance that a bureaucracy thinks they can terminate a meaningful relationship with an order. Just because they made that relationship end didn't mean it ended for FOSTER SON. He has suffered and continues to suffer because of it. FOSTER SON is still in the state and still living with his other foster family. We have been privileged to get to know them. As wonderful as they are, FOSTER SON knows who we are and continues to feel a strong connection to us. These bonds are real and when they are broken there are real consequences. We currently continue to support FOSTER SON the best we can. For the last five months, once or twice a week we take FOSTER SON for a day. My husband takes work off, the kids forego their usual schedules and we spend that entire day with FOSTER SON. We drive him back in the evening, hand him to the foster family, and have to look into his eyes as he cries and reaches for us and then we walk away.

My husband and I became foster parents in [REDACTED]. After participating in PRIDE training, we were so excited to become a part of something much bigger than ourselves, especially since the training emphasized that we would be part of a team that would work together for the well-being of children in foster care. PRIDE also emphasized the

importance of continuity, stability, and permanence for these especially vulnerable children.

The following year we fostered an infant. He came to us as a newborn, directly from the hospital. Several months went by and a woman from [REDACTED] came forward, saying she wanted Baby D. She had previously adopted two (of eight) of Baby D's biological siblings. We voiced our concerns to the department, which included the fact that Baby D had bonded to us, as well as the fact that the family in [REDACTED] had five children in the home, two of whom were under the age of five and both had FAS (one with severe handicaps requiring constant medical attention and multiple therapies) as did Baby D. We were concerned that his needs could not be adequately met. The GAL assigned to the case began to express similar concerns to the department, as did the county prosecutor. At that point, the department completely turned on us. They were openly rude and disrespectful to us, though we had only ever politely, respectfully tried to talk through our concerns with them. They refused to work with the GAL at all; the situation became so difficult that the GAL was given an attorney to represent him in hearings. During that time, we did everything the caseworker asked us to do, including extremely difficult interactions with the family in [REDACTED]. When we asked the caseworker to please help us facilitate appropriate visitations with the other family, she told us to 'figure it out ourselves since we were adults'.

When Baby D was nine months old, the courts granted the department's request to have him placed in the home in [REDACTED]; however, since it was over state lines, the department could not actually move Baby D to their home until another hearing could be scheduled to get approval for an out-of-state placement. Workers on the case were so angry and frustrated by that time, and their treatment of us became a terrible reflection of that. They grew tired of waiting for the out of state approval to move Baby D, so they abruptly removed him from our home and placed him in a foster home hours away from us. He had never met that foster family. He had only ever lived with us and was absolutely and completely attached to us. There was zero attention given to how this would affect this little person, to one day just be removed from his family and never see them again, and be placed with total strangers, all for expediency! The department would only have waited two-three weeks, and Baby D could have at least been spared what must have been exceptionally painful and frightening. All I have been able to think about in the two years since, is how utterly abandoned he must have felt. My heart is forever broken for him, and the unnecessary pain he has suffered.

We did not continue as foster parents afterwards, even though many in the department said we were among the best foster parents they had, and they wanted us to stay. We could no longer participate in a system that bullied its way over foster families, court appointed guardians, and the very children they claimed to care for.

Our son was placed in our home at 4 months of age. His mother had passed away that day and his family asked to have him placed in foster care. Within a short time a family from out of state expressed interest in adopting him. The department worked hard to make the move. He went to live with them after being in our home for 5 months. Three months later I received a call from the adoptive family saying they were not going to adopt him and were bringing home back to Idaho in a few days. I stated, he is coming home to us. This is when I was told the department had found another adoptive family. I was stunned that this was the first I was hearing this. I promptly called the case worker. She informed me that indeed another family had been chosen. I asked why we had not been asked if we would like to adopt. She said she had spoken to our licensing worker and understood that we never intended to adopt. I explained that we did not go in to foster care with that intent. However, given the situation we would like the opportunity to adopt him. I was told the decision was already made and it was too late. My heart was broken. My husband and I discussed the situation that evening and decided I would call our licensing worker in the morning. We both felt strongly that he needed to be with us. We couldn't stand the thought of him having to go to another home. I called our worker. I expected her to know why I was calling. She seemed confused. I explained what had taken place. She told me that she had not talked to the case worker. At that point she offered to take our case to her boss and above. Over the next day and a half meeting were had. I received a call from the case worker saying he could come home to us. BUT...not to think that it means we will be allowed to

adopt him. I expressed how happy I was he didn't have to go to another home. She told me he wouldn't remember us. She even asked if we had any animals. I said, yes a dog. She said, good he will remember the dog. Two days later our son came home. As soon as he saw me he reached for me. My daughter and I gave him a bath that night. When I took him out of the bathtub he said "mama" for the first time. Remember he is a year old! He had never said that before. I knew then he knew who I was.

The first time the case worker came to the house after our son came home she dropped a bomb that he has 12 year old half-brother. This had never come up the five months he was with us before. She explained that if we didn't agree to visits they probably would not allow us to adopt him. This was the tone for the next 9 months until the adoption was final.

Now to do my best to explain the impact this has had on our son and family. When he came back home he had skin issues that he did not have prior. He had an open sore the size of a quarter on his back that the other family was treating with steroids. It would not heal. Our dermatologist said that it was due to stress/anxiety. We now have three different kinds of creams to use when he has flares. It took about a year to resolve the initial skin issues. Now the pop up here and there.

The biggest thing we noticed when he came home was there was no light in his eyes. (this is where it gets hard to explain on paper) He had no emotions. Our friend, who has a child with RAD looked at him and said she would not allow anyone to touch him. She explained he needed to attach. We limited him being around people other than our immediate family for six months. If we were going out I always wore him in a carrier. We didn't let anyone else hold him. I did all of his care. It was exhausting. This was very difficult given the fact that our other two children were teenagers. Going to school, church, and other events as a family was a thing of the past. The results were slow. He did not start showing emotion until he was 3.

Our son was enrolled in the infant toddler program until he aged out at three. At that time they said he would not qualify for the preschool at the school. We agreed and sent him to a private preschool. This is when we saw his attachment issues. The preschool was not able to understand or deal with his "quirks". In order to feel secure, he attaches himself to objects. He would always want the same car. Therefore, they hid his favorite car which took his security away. This had snowball effect. We decided to take him out of preschool and seek professional help. He began seeing play therapist once a week. The therapist recommended that we had a neuropsych test done. The therapist worked with me and our son on teaching him emotions. He could not tell you how he felt. He always said he was happy. And he had no idea that other people had emotions other than happy. We also worked on correct behavior with strangers. He would ask to get in strangers cars. And touch people at the grocery store. He still struggles with strangers. She explained to me that he is emotionally half his chronological age. We worked on what that looks like and how to deal with that in daily life. We saw this therapist for 1 ½ years.

In that time when he was 4 we enrolled him in different preschool. This preschool only had six children. There were two teachers. It was difficult for the teachers with him. They were understanding with him and made it work. He is now in kindergarten. He is doing better than I expected. Yet, he is on a 504 and is defiantly not emotionally with the other children. He often does not want me to leave because he doesn't think I will come back. It is heart breaking. I reassure him that mommy always comes back.

Daily life is so different. Going to the store he needs to know he will be safe and I will not leave him there. He has to know when will daddy be coming home. Are brother and sister ever going to come back from college? When we take a trip he asks if we are going to leave him there? Or is someone else going to be living in our house when we get home? He has often told me he didn't like being a baby that it was scary. When his siblings have friends over he tells them he loves them and cries when they leave. (this is getting better, still a work in progress) He asks me daily who parent helper will be in his classroom. (he always needs to be reminded he is safe)

Family vacations go like this: the way there he wants to go home, the first night he doesn't sleep, the next day he doesn't want to leave the room, that night he throws up before going to sleep. If the trip is longer than two night he doesn't want to go back home.

I wish I could explain better what it is like to watch your child struggle with not feeling secure. It hurts that he doesn't know that he isn't going to another home. It causes anxiety in so many ways I can't express them all. Eating, sleeping, playing with friends, school, church, sports, learning, everything!

We got the call to take 2 ½ year old, identical twin boys in to our foster home in [REDACTED]. Approximately 3 months later the caseworker asked us to consider adoption as the biological parents were failing to meet their goals on the case plan. After family discussions and prayer our family was excited to say “yes” to being the boys’ permanent placement. However, at about 15 months in to the case it was decided that the boys would be reintroduced and transitioned to their biological parents. Right from the beginning of a visitation schedule, we knew things weren’t right. We suspected drug use and reported it. However; 17 months later they were placed back with the biological parents, along with their little brother who had been in the same foster home since birth and was now 22 months old (he knew no other parents). They also had an older sister who was also living in the home. My husband and I forged a relationship with the biological parents determined to mentor them for the better of the boys and their siblings. Sadly within months they were evicted from their apartment. We got word that drugs were still an issue. The parents allowed us visits and even asked us to babysit and do a few overnight visits on some weekends. We bought food, clothes, and shoes for the boys, hoping to improve the situation. The mother seemed increasingly mentally unstable and we suspected spousal abuse based on stories the boys would tell us when staying with us and the injuries their mother had such as bruises, black eyes, and knocked out tooth. Their trailer smelled of feces, as there apparently was issue with their septic. The twins entered kindergarten and they missed so much school that they had to be transferred to a special class because they had gotten so far behind. Apparently getting them to school by noon for ½ day of school was too much for the parents who complained they were overwhelmed. Finally 14 months after being placed back with the parents we got word that they were being placed back into foster care with us. I already was babysitting them that night at my home. The judge was to sign the order the next day and they would reenter into foster care at our home. However, the biological grandmother saw me the boys at the store, and took them out of my cart and left with them, angry that I was being allowed to babysit. The caseworker told me that she would go get them the next day after the order was signed and bring them to us. That never happened. The caseworker decided to place with biological grandparents despite the fact that she previously had allowed visitation with the parents without the approval of the department and had a previous arrest record for injury to a child. In addition, the department hired an attachment specialist to see where they had parental attachment and it was found they had attachment with us, none the less they were placed with the grandparents and adoption was to take place [REDACTED]. They lived with the biological grandparents for a full year before she was arrested on DUI charges with a child in the car who was not belted (not one of the twins or little brother). The DUI charges came five day prior to the final adoption court date. They were finally placed back with us following the arrest and later adopted.

However, the department’s handling of the case left as many emotional and mental scars on the children as what the parents had done!! They are now 11 years and still struggle with nightmares and abnormal fears for boys their age. One of them struggled to self regulate requiring counseling. The other one pulled his hair and eyelashes out due to anxiety. They both have had counseling as a result of the trauma of the department forcing a sibling bond by placing them all together for 2 years with the end result of them being back in the foster homes they started at and the sister still living with the biological grandparents. They were very behind in school because of all the missed kindergarten and lack of help while with the grandparents. It took 3 years of hard work to get them up to grade level. During their time with the parents they witnessed and can recall, drugs use, drug manufacturing, the selling of drugs, and domestic violence. During their time with the grandparents they were locked in the basement for punishment, the biological mother was allowed to come and go as she pleased, leaving them very insecure about when they would see her next. At one point she lived in the basement of the grandparents house, though the boys were told not to tell anyone. One of them has memories of pornography movies being played in the homes. All of this could have been prevented by requiring the parents to follow every part the case plan and following up to make sure it was truly being done. At one court date the father lied about the mom completing drug rehab (which she had left before completing) and lied on why he was unable to keep a job. The facts were easy to follow up on but yet the department chose not to present the fact or follow up on said stories. It sickens me to know that these beautiful twin boys had to endure so much beyond what they had already gone through just because the department was so determined to reunify and then later place with biological family. Obviously the decisions made WERE NOT in the

best interest of any of the children in this case and there it has left scars. Please call me with any further questions on our case. I am happy to do whatever it takes to assist in changing the laws as to reduce the amount of trauma kids must endure.

My husband and I were fostering an 18 month old, we got him when he was 3 months old with a broken leg, he is a kin to our children, he was returned to his mother [REDACTED]. The social worker has told the court system that she was working her plan, we are totally dumb founded to this, she is still married, she is living with her boyfriend in a trailer that has no running water, they live on property of some friends. She has sense had another child and has had 3 adopted before our little guy came to us, we gave him a wonderful life, lots of room to run, lots of toys, lots of love, we care deeply and have a real bond with the child and now he is gone, we are devastated, she is now working and the boyfriend has a somewhat job. We saw a guardian ad litem twice in the 15 months we had him, we were the ones that was up all night with him when he got sick, she never showed up to one of his doctor appointments, our whole family love him, we saw him in court, he stunk, like he hadn't been bathed, he dug through my purse and ate some candy like he was starving, we were told they were dealing drugs, and none of that was checked out. The social worker stopped working with us. We would love to see something happen to help us and all the children that are not being treated right.

I am from Idaho grew up in Boise and Eagle area. I believe that what you are all fighting for is right. I also think that parents who get their kids taken by Social Services should have a time frame of working to get their children back. I also believe if they don't reach those goals that the foster parent should have the right to adopt the child. I believe that some people are using their kids for benefits of food stamps, free housing, cash assistance, and many other things. I believe that this why their is abuse and neglect to scare the children to not say anything cause these parents loose their piggy banks. I have seen people get section 8 housing and have a 4 bedroom and loose their children but not their housing when a family who does love and care for their children need it and would appreciate it more. I feel so sadden that Idaho knows this is the reality of it all and has let it go. Start drug testing for food stamps, and housing, and cash assistance and do it randomly. We need change for our kids. We need to protect them cause if we don't who wil. Fight cause I support change. I was a kid that was in the system too.

My story is this: about 3 years ago my 2 nieces were taken from their biological parents and went into the system. At the time nobody else in our family was able to take custody of them. So they remained at a foster home for a short time before the state began their push for permanent placing and adoption. A couple who knew the foster parents from church had fallen in love with the girls and decided to just attend the permanent placing meeting and ended up leaving being that placement. Shortly after the meeting the girls were moved and have been living with this family since. I want to say it has been over 2 years just since being with their permanent family. This couple is such a great couple and the youngest of the girls barely being 3 when they were taken only recognizes them as mom and dad. They attended all the meetings and had even attended meetings that they were told were for the adoption process. The official court date for adoption was to be end of January. Well just before the court date the state informed them that the girls would be removed from the home. No reason given. So the couple has gotten an attorney and is trying to fight this, but at court they were basically told the judge couldnt do anything.. so they will be going to another court this week with their attorney and also a judge appointed representative for the girls aside from guardian at litem. We are all confused and lost at why the girls were taken and the states plan is to put them back into foster care.. I know this is a long message but I reach out for advice and also for support to stand with your cause! They are hurting kids that already have been through too much!

I am glad that there is a group banding together to get foster care reformed. I licensed homes for [REDACTED] years, until I retired in [REDACTED]. I was [REDACTED] licensing homes [REDACTED]

There are foster parents who work as peer mentors and trainers who have been told to keep their mouths shut and to not get involved in this "fight". So just know that you may have some advocates who are not being allowed to speak out.

Also, there is a judge in ██████ County, Judge ██████, who is really mad at the Dept. right now due to possible lying in reports and on the stand, He might be an interesting person for you all to contact.

Please know that I need to keep my name out of this due to ongoing relationships with foster parents who could end up with a problem if my name gets out, You can contact me by messenger though and I will help if I can.

This could not have been addressed at a better time. I was a foster parent from ██████ until ██████ of my 6week old grandson at the time until he was 13 months old with very minimal contact with his biological parents after being taken from the only family he knew (my family) and being placed with complete strangers and into a drug infested abusive home. I'd love to share my story. I told myself after experiencing what I did as a grandparent foster parent I would never foster another child through this state again. I was used and mistreated and most importantly my grandson now suffers now from ADHD, behavioral issues and separation fear. He is under the care of many specialist and treatment weekly to help with the life long scars he has to now live with. They are destroying these innocent hearts with their current process and guidelines. I fought for my grandparent rights and after a year the judge honored them however I can't ever imagine having to put anyone through the pain heartache and suffering I went through as well as my grandson. It's a very sad system. Do I send you the story here?

The complete story of how I ended up in foster care is lengthy but will try and explain in a shorter version. If you feel you need additional information please contact me. I have been speaking out for years but has always fell on deaf ears. When I was about a year old my father obtained full custody of both my sister and I. She was about two and half. We moved several hundred miles away for work. He worked rotating shifts because of the work he did. Two weeks each, days, nights and graveyard. Due to this schedule he met a family that was willing to help him take care of us. They set up an arrangement where us kids would stay with this family during the week and with our dad on the weekends and he could visit whenever. This arrangement worked well and continued for about five years until we were seven and nine and he died in a work related accident.

According to the court documents I've obtained, an aunt decided she wanted us and within a month and a half CPS opened and closed our case granting her full guardianship with the exception that we would get to spend part of our summers with the other family. Our new guardian took it upon herself not to follow the court order after the first summer visit. We were told they didn't want us to come any more and that they didn't love us but only wanted us for our trust funds. Also, in the document from CPS it clearly states they had no intention of following up on us after the guardianship was granted. I began running away within the first year of placement and was returned several times by police and told to be a good girl and that I should be thankful I had such a caring family that loved me and a beautiful house to live in. They like so many others wouldn't listen to me, I was just a child and didn't know what was best for me. Even at age seven I knew I didn't like to listen, watch or be the target of the abuse that when on in that house. Even at a young age I knew it wasn't a healthy environment. My sister and I never experienced that kind of behavior with our father or the other family we lived with.

It wasn't until several years later that CPS agreed to become involved again, which seemed to take an act of congress. My sister ran away and reached out to the other family for help and they stepped up knowing they could get in trouble with the law. They drove hundreds of miles to pick her up and then filed for custody for both of us. When we went to court the judge CHOSE reject all of our alligations toward our guardian and her family even though she admitted to them in court or at least she admitted to it after she tried to down play everything. According to the court document, she stated that refused to let us live with this other family and if we did not want to live with her she would allow us to be placed into foster care but also stipulated to the court only if it was in the

ADA county court jurisdiction. We still chose not to live with her so the judge granted her wish and punished us by placing us into separate foster homes with her guidelines of it being in ADA county. We never lived together again and the separation separated us to a degree. However, I must note that though we were now in the states custody she retained guardianship over our trust funds which meant we never escaped her because we had to go to her for anything, lunch money, school clothes, etc.

I entered foster care when I was 15 almost 16 my dad sexually abused me and my mom passed away leaving me and my 4 siblings. I turn 20 on Sunday and I aged out when I was 18. Me and my siblings weren't able to get adopted because the state didn't allow it we had a family who loved us and took us all in as theirs. They had issues against my foster mom making it seem like she was the problem. I was put in a mental hospital two weeks before my 18th birthday and was told my foster mom didn't want anything to do with me that she didn't want me to go back to her and not to call her which was all a lie they had told her I was the one who didn't want anything to do with her. I was in there for almost 9 days because I had no where to go my case worker would visit me in there and tell me I would have to go to a shelter home for homeless. My little brother who is still in the system has suffered because the state refuses to do what we think is best for us. Having a family who actually cares and wants you to be apart of is hard to find and when we did we got it taken away from us. I think it has affected all of us tremendously because we have struggled to make it without a mother or father figure. I would anything to go back to having my family together where we belong.

We met with the Department and they really can't tell us why they took the children from our home and placed them in a home where they are sure to endure a life of abuse and neglect. We loved them and cared for them for two years, ten months, and seven days. We were promised we would be allowed to adopt them, but that never happened. The head of IDHW can't possibly conceive that the case workers made an error as he stated he has been up and down this state and none of his social workers would ignore children on their case loads. My claim was no one has ever talked to these children about how they are, what they want, or even knew them. The Department would not make such a horrific mistake. He feels our experience is not typical of how people feel about the department. He said he knew the workers involved personally and they would never harm children. We were promised so many things and we did everything asked of us. The children ages 3 and 6 knew us as their family. They were told by the caseworker we would be adopting them, but it didn't happen because Supervisors who never met the children decided a distant cousin should adopt the kids. We reached out to the dept heads, the governor otter, his wife, senators, and lawyers. No one could help us the state went against the Judges ruling to not remove the children, but that didn't matter to the dept. the CASA was also in our side, but hi opinion didn't matter either. We got one visit with the children they begged to come home, I can still feel my little boys sobs on my chest as the case worker told him no. My little girl asked if I would go to the cemetery and put flowers on her grave to remember her. I later ran into her at school she asked me if I was still trying to bring her home, and that her new Mom and the department told her we were the bad guys and she couldn't hug me anymore. Later that week I got a letter from the department that I was not allowed to have any contact. When we see their sad faces at Walmart we have to look away, just because we didn't agree with the department to change their permanency plan. The children are doing poorly in school and are treated poorly by their new family, but the department doesn't care. They have no interest in doing what is best for children. Case workers told me if they disagree with a supervisor they could lose their jobs. There are no checks and balances, new legislation protecting our most vulnerable is long over due. Not a day goes by, that I don't think of those children and what that little boy was thinking when he begged me not to give him away. I didn't have a choice.

Hi, I saw the KTVB news report about what you are trying to do. I was a foster child for 6 years. I saw many children come in & out of our home. It broke my parents heart, every time one of their foster children was removed. The H&W is definitely broken and needs fixed. They wanted to adopt me & I wanted to be adopted, but H&W wouldn't

allow it. They wanted to put me back in a home that wasn't safe for me.... Just like many of my foster brothers & sisters that did return. The same thing happen to you happened to their kids.... Removed! The kids Their lives... Didn't turn out good. I rebelled and I wanted to make a choice about my life and what I wanted. I wanted to be adopted, be loved, be wanted, be a part of a FAMILY. The system didn't care, I was just a case file about a girl who was raped & sexually assaulted for years by her moms husband, and physically & mental abused by her mother for 12 yrs. I was just another file in the stack of thousands. My rebellion and anger coast me my family. In the end (30 yrs later) with time and hard knocks. I grew up and realized my parents, [REDACTED] changed & saved my life. There needs / has to be a change to the broken system. I was a lucky one, but so many were not/are not. You have my support!!!

Our two biological sons were placed with us at 3 months, and four years old. After two years of living with us we started the adoption process. Suddenly, out of no where, a biological aunt who had never met the boys, decided she wanted them. Despite being the only parents our younger son had ever known, and despite the fact that our older son (who had major neglect and abandonment issues), had finally begun to trust again, Idaho Health and Welfare decided it was in their best interest to have the aunt adopt the boys. (We were so close to the end of our adoption process when this happened!) We fought hard to keep them. We called for a meeting with H&W. We met with attorneys. Nothing mattered. We had no rights! Within days, the boys were on their way to Washington State. Three months later, Idaho Health and Welfare called to tell us the aunt didn't want them anymore. They were " too hard"...

My wife flew to Washington the next day to get our boys. Nine years later we are still dealing with the affects of that decision made by Idaho Health and Welfare. Neglect, abuse, and abandonment all occurred within those three months. Our boys were home during the day with my wife here in Idaho, but while in [REDACTED], they were in daycare 50-60hrs a week. The aunt thought our baby was too chubby, so she withheld food from the 2 1/2 year old. He has hoarding, and impulse issues to this day because of it. Our older son doesn't trust, and has relationship issues to this day. He has been diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder (R.A.D.), Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (D.M.D.), Impulse Control Disorder (I.C.D.), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (A.D.H.D.), and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (O.C.D.). Our family struggles with these behaviors daily.

Our daughter came to our home right after her first birthday. (Her 2nd foster placement.) We also took in her biological brother who was 4 days old. She was removed from our home to live with her maternal grandmother 5 months later. (Our son remained with us because he was a very sick baby, and had Down Syndrome. The grandmother couldn't care for him.) Our daughter was returned to us a year later when grandma realized a little toddler was a lot of work.

Idaho Health and Welfare made a terrible decision in each of these cases! In many states, as soon as a child has been in a home for a certain length of time (6 months, 1 year, etc.), the foster family gains greater rights over the child than a biological relative. We would love to see something like that in Idaho's law! This summary doesn't even hit on all that we had to go through, and put up with as foster parents. It is far beyond time for a change in Idaho's system!

With kinship placements, the permanency time frame is apparently not enforced/different . We had our granddaughter for 22 months (her 3rd time living with us, 1st as a foster child). She had spent over 2/3 of her life with us. Diagnosed RAD, PTSD, Anxiety disorder, and SPD. Parents were not following their plan, not going to her therapy sessions 2x a week, inconsistent on visits, and the plan was to adopt. A new caseworker and suddenly she wrote a new report and the day of the termination hearing, they went for reuniting. They also changed judges for this hearing. 2 days later, my granddaughter was placed back with her parents. The caseworker supervisor also discontinued her play therapy and ignored music therapy recommendations in the final weeks. Even the professionals we worked with recommended her not be returned to her parents. I am a psychology student, and with the struggles finding therapists who worked with attachment/trauma children who took her medicaid, I focused my

schooling on it so I could help her as well as my family with healing. I took a break from college towards the end and with only 6 credits left, I need to get back in and focus on trying to make a difference again. It destroyed me, and changed my family forever.

My name is [REDACTED], and am bringing my story to you as many others are in hope that the State of Idaho will truly understand and embrace the vital need not only to encourage change regarding the Family Reunification process within the Department of Health and Welfare but ensure it is implemented.

There is so much I want to say but due to the amount of time will keep this as brief as possible. Please feel free to contact me if you find yourself with questions. I know I would have questions had I not lived it.

Though, I am happy in my adult life I still have many bitter feelings and struggle with trust issues both which stem from the deceit and excuses endured as child by our guardian, CPS and various others within the medical and legal system. The bitterness only grew after obtaining several court documents, evaluations and letters written by various people within the legal system. They only opened up new questions such as who was my guardian and why did she have so much pull within each agency we sought help from. Why it wasn't considered a conflict of interest that her attorney was our pediatrician's brothers.

Early childhood age two to seven

After becoming a single parent of two preschoolers our father decided he wanted a fresh start. Once he secured a new job and made arrangements for our care, we moved far away to begin our new life. While our new living situation was out of the norm by societies standards, we were happy, healthy and a well-adjusted children. Due to our father's work schedule of rotating shifts, he made arrangements for us to stay with a family during the week and with him on the weekends. This arrangement worked well for almost five years and would have continued had our father not passed away.

Scenario I

This is when the lying and deceit began, along with countless incidents of physical, verbal and emotional abuse. The following three scenarios can be found in the documentation mentioned above.

My sister and I were made wards of the state within ten days after the our father's death with temporary custody was granted to the family we were currently living with. Four days later the state permitted a relative a two week visitation in Boise under the pretense we would be returned after attending our father's funeral. The day before we were to return to the other family the relative filed for a change of venue to Ada county and filed for custody. The other family filed an opposition to change the venue to Ada county.

According to a letter written by Health and Welfare's, Director of Legal and Special Services, dated FORTY days after the death of our father, they determined that this relative was a proper and suitable person for custody and NO FURTHER SUPERVISION would be required from the department after ONE home visit.

It is plainly obvious this was well planned out ahead of time by both CPS and our relative. As a bedroom had already been fully furnished, from top to bottom which also included a brand new wardrobe prior to arriving for what was supposed to be only be a two-week visit.

Scenario II

I ran away and called my probation officer an hour or so later after locating a safe place to call from. She lead me to believe she was going to place me in detention but instead she scheduled a court hearing where the judge ordered me to return to the home. I resisted and tried to run but ended up being escorted to the car by an officer. Once in the car I locked the doors, but was defeated yet again. The officer showed my guardian's husband how to hold my hand and wrist to keep me from resisting while he drove back to the house. Then after placing me in my room he made his own son stand guard over me while he left the room. He returned with some rope and tied me to my bed. I

repeatedly asked his son to let me go even though I knew he wouldn't. When he finished they closed the door and proceeded to secure it from the outside. I was left like that until he passed out later that night.

Not sure if his son enjoyed watching this or if he himself was scared of what his dad would do if he didn't do as he was told. I still struggle to this day with not knowing the answer as he like the kids who lived there does not like to relive the past. Looking back, I believe he was living his own nightmare and feared what may happen if he stood up for us and more importantly for himself.

To make this clear, I didn't run away for fun but to save myself from a weekend that I knew was going to get ugly. It had already been a bad week at the house. They made plans to go to the cabin for the weekend which meant the ride home on HWY 21 would be a literal nightmare because he would be drunk. It was bad enough when he drove drunk but even worse when his wife drove. If she didn't go as fast as he wanted or pass each car, he would reach over from the passenger side and fight her for control of the steering wheel and stomp on gas pedal.

I preferred being in detention, I felt safe there even though I didn't care for my probation officer because she too chose to ignore my pleas for help. I returned there several times each time hoping CPS would reopen our case and permanently remove us. It did finally happen but not for another year or two and it certainly wasn't in our best interest how it turned out.

Scenario III

After a few years trying to get help through the juvenile court system my sister reached out to the family who cared for us before our dad passed away. They drove the five hundred miles to pick her up and again filed for custody of both of us.

During the custody hearing is when we found out we had been lied to about so many things, like why the scheduled visitation stopped. Our guardian finally confirmed several of our allegations, such as; monitoring of all phone calls, intercepting mail, she slept in our bedroom with us, boarding bedroom windows closed. She also confirm that there was verbal and physical abuse including the incident where I was tied to a bed. She testified that, "her husband after drinking, would become upset and as a result she would leave with the kids and spend the night in a motel, but then stated the excuse, "She did not see anything wrong with this as her husband worked hard and should be entitled to unwind."

She also testified that, "if we chose not to remain with her she would attempt to put us in foster care, stipulating as long as it was within the jurisdiction of Ada county. Just like a broken record she already knew she was going to get her way for the most part. Which explains why her and her attorney didn't any bother to present any evidence at all that other family was unfit to care for us.

At the end of the day, the judge still granted in favor of our guardian. When we continued to stand up for ourselves by refusing to live with her, CPS re-opened our case handed down worst punishment of all, they separated us by placing us in different foster financial control homes while allowing her to maintain our trust funds and SSI benefits. In reality meant she not only did she maintain complete insight to our daily lives but was able to maintain a fair amount of control and continue with the verbal and emotional abuse. She even told one of my foster parents they needed to keep tabs on me because who ever murdered our dad was looking to do the same to my sister and I. My father wasn't murdered he was in a work related accident along with several others. In one of the documents she stated that she was constantly receiving calls from someone who claiming they were going to kidnap and hurt us kids.

Since we had a trust fund we did not receive benefits from the state like most foster kids, we had to contact her for any financial needs; lunch money, clothes, school activities, etc. When I asked why a financial advisory couldn't over see our trust, I was simply told that it was just told that it our case was unique and it was out of their hands to multiple things I wouldn't understand.

Impact of being Silenced

My sister and I only had each other to lean on since our father died when we were seven and nine. We needed each other, there was a family that wanted both of us, but due to nothing more than spite we were separated which took two spots in the foster care program that could have been used for two other children in need.

Reviewing these documents has helped me understand my feelings of helplessness were and still are justified. I have always felt CPS labeled us "Damaged Goods" to used to be lab rats to gain statistics for a long term research projects. How long can they survive before they mentally break, commits suicide, become a criminal or an addict.

Closure

There were four kids raised in this house whom were seriously affected in different ways which followed them each into adulthood.

One has resided in a nursing home for the past ten years due to permanent brain damage from alcohol. He was diagnosis at age six with ulcers and in his thirties had to have part of his stomach removed.

One continues to remain silent and not confront issues. I do not feel comfortable making a statement on his behalf. I can only speculate his feelings and his journey.

One was involved in a tragic domestic violence situation and is currently in prison. Had they been able to trust the system and came forward when the incident happened they would not be there as it was self-defense. I strongly believe had they been treated differently as child they would not have wound up becoming the sixth spouse of someone who was referred to by many as the town bully and a spousal abuser.

Which leaves me, the youngest. By age fourteen due to all the stress I was also diagnosed with ulcers. I was bounced between at least fifteen homes and ten school transfers within four years. With each move I had to learn to re-adjust not only to a new family but house rules, schedules, meals, sleeping arrangements, religious beliefs, school, and was always on edge wondering when the next placement would take place. Instead of being taught trust, I was taught fear. Not only from my guardians, but CPS and other agencies within the judicial system. Right or wrong I believe CPS labeled me at age seven, "Damaged Goods" there for deemed unworthy of either a loving home or justice and the other agencies willing followed their lead.

