



March 7, 2018

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Tiddens. I am the Community Outreach Director for Idaho Voices for Children, and I am here to share our support of Senate Bill 1341.

At Idaho Voices for Children, we help advance policy solutions to issues impacting the health and well-being of children and their families. Feeling safe, loved, and cared for at home is something that every child deserves and is why one of our top priorities is to improve Idaho's foster care outcomes.

We are pleased with the Interim Foster Care Study Committee and the sponsors' work on this difficult subject and feel that, if passed, Senate Bill 1341 will have lasting, positive impacts on our most vulnerable population. You should have a factsheet with our logo in front of you that discusses this legislation and why we think it is a step forward.

Looking at the bill, I want to lift up the section aimed at preserving sibling connections in foster care. When we decided to engage in efforts to strengthen the foster care system, our first step was to visit with the Foster Youth Advisory Board. We learned about the issue of brothers and sisters being separated in care, and we learned how committed these young people are to preventing others from having to live through the trauma of losing contact with siblings. The suggested policy solution on page two of this bill came about thanks to the passionate leadership of these individuals, including Chalyce, who testified before the interim committee this fall. Chalyce is here today to share her story and expertise on the subject. I am going to defer to her to provide context around why this intent language is so important.

Next, I want to express our support for the section that strengthens services for newly reunified families. Most children who end up in foster care in Idaho are reunited with their parents. Research shows that providing appropriate and timely services after children return home results in better outcomes and fewer cases of repeat maltreatment. Reunification is a stressful time for families. But strong wraparound services can help ease the stress of transition. While we do not want children to remain in the foster care system any longer than absolutely necessary, we also want to ensure they go home to safe and stable environments with supports readily available if things get tough.

This bill is a good first step in improving the lives of children in foster care. But as child advocates, our ultimate goal is to prevent child maltreatment and eliminate the need for foster care altogether. We look forward to continuing to work with legislators on this ever evolving and complicated topic and to promoting strategies that prevent child abuse and neglect.

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for taking time today to discuss opportunities to improve foster care in Idaho. And thank you to the interim committee members who are leading these efforts and this legislation, especially co-chairs Rep. Perry and Sen. Lee.

I encourage you to support Senate Bill 1341 and send it to the floor with a due pass recommendation. I will stand for questions.