

TESTIMONY OF SUSAN MARINELLI IN SUPPORT OF SB 1269

For Judiciary Committee Public Hearing, April 4, 2007

Good Afternoon Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and Committee members. I am here today to speak in support of SB1269 a bill to help the Commission on Child Protection to provide better representation for children in DCF care.

I think it is extremely important that foster children have a voice in court proceedings, because the outcome of the proceedings affects them profoundly. It affects foster parents as well, because good foster parents do care about their children's future and well-being, but it affects the children mostly because it is their future that is on the line. That voice is their legal representation.

My husband and I have been foster parents for about three years. We have a biological son who is 13. We decided to become foster parents when our now three-year-old daughter came to us at the age of seven weeks. We knew that we could make a difference in her life, and possibly the lives of other children. We ended up adopting our three-year-old, and now also have two foster children, ages 5 and 12. The foster children in our home have been with us for two and one-half years, and I can count on one hand the number of times their attorney has been to see them. I myself do not know his name. They do not know who he is or what his purpose serves. It seems like he only comes to see them when it is right before a major court conference or trial, and even then he only sees them for a very short time. I am sure he is a very busy attorney with other clients, but he really needs to get to know the children and see them as they are on an average day, and not just go through the motions.

I have worked in the legal field for over 20 years, and have worked with and seen other attorneys who are zealous advocates for children, who have visited their young clients regularly, developed a relationship with them and who really care about the well-being of the children. These attorneys are just as busy as everyone else, yet they take the time and make the effort to show that they really care about the kids.

It is so very important for foster children to have solid relationships. Most of these kids have people who come into and go out of their lives like through a revolving door. My foster son told me just the other day that his biological mother was not married to either his father or the father of his half-siblings. When he did a family tree at school, he included me and my husband, and he told me we were the only people on the family tree who were married!

You may not realize it now, but these children are very affected by who they come in contact with, and you can be just another person who they perceive doesn't care about them, or you can be someone who really makes a difference.

Susan Marinelli