

Testimony of Patrick Carolan on SB 1010 February

Good morning Senator Harris Rep Villano and members of the Human Services committee. My name is Patrick Carolan. I am here today to testify in favor of SB 1010 an act providing free college tuition for foster children who are adopted. My wife Stella and I have been involved as foster and adoptive parents for about 6 years. During that time we have cared for several children, some for a short period of time and a few for longer. We also have two birth children. With all the children who have come into our home we have had one simple rule when they are with us they are family and treated as family. When we go on vacation or to family events they come with us and are part of the event. In 2002 we were asked if we would take care of a brother and sister. They were 9 and 11. They had been in and out of foster care since they were about 3 and 4. They had been abandoned abused and neglected. Because of their ages and situations they were at the stage were they were difficult to place. My son was in fourth grade and reading at a kindergarten level, he had been expelled from his previous school, and was considered a serious discipline problem; his sister was 11 looking like she was 13 and emotionally about 3. In 2003 we were asked if we would consider adopting them. We said yes. Even though they had been in foster care for over 5 years it still took another 18 months for the adoption to be finalized. In September 2004 the adoption was final. During the time he was a foster child with us we sent our son to private schools, special summer programs and private tutoring to help him. All of which cost thousands upon thousands of dollars. None of which the state paid for. I only mention this because I have heard people comment that foster parents are only in it for the money. This by far is about the most ignorant statement I have heard anyone make. Stella and I are not unique among foster parents. Every foster parent that I know, and we know many, spends exorbitant amount of time and resources to help their foster children that far outweighs the meager stipend and limited support that DCF provides. If you ever want to meet a real hero, talk to a foster parent.

As you may be aware a foster child is a ward of the State. Therefore the state is responsible for paying college tuition for that child if he/she is still in the care of the state when they reach college age. This was just one of many benefits and services that foster children lost when they were adopted. This led to a strong disincentive for foster parents to adopt their foster children. The Department of Children and Families and the legislature recognized this disincentive and two years ago attempted to correct it. You passed legislation that said that foster children who were adopted by their foster parents would receive college tuition from the state upon graduating from high school. Unfortunately for whatever reason the department and the legislature decided to make the benefit effective only for those children who were adopted after January 1 2005. There is no reason why foster children adopted before 2005 should not receive the same benefits as those adopted after 2005. There is no reason why they should be discriminated against simply because they were adopted before 2005. These children at an early age, and through no fault of their own, have been through a hell that you and I cannot even begin to imagine. I ask you to please pass SB 1010 and give these children a chance to not just get by but to be successful. They deserve it.

By the way my son is now in 8th grade. He is a B student doing 8th grade work, he plays trumpet in his school band, goalie for his lacrosse team and center for his basketball team.

Thank You