

Testimony In Support of Raised Bill No. 5699, An Act Improving Outcomes for Children under the Custody, Care or Supervision of the Commissioner of Children and Families
Mark E. Courtney, Ph.D.

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Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am the Ballmer Endowed Chair in Child Well-Being in the School of Social Work at the University of Washington and serve as Director of Partners for Our Children, a public-private partnership devoted to the improvement of the public child welfare system.

Based on research I have conducted on the timing of juvenile court proceedings and its impact on permanency outcomes for foster children¹, I support the legislation pending before your committee that would shorten the time between court reviews to three months. My research was done in collaboration with the juvenile court in Dane County, Wisconsin. Court officials in Dane County were interested at that time in assessing whether reducing the period between juvenile court reviews might keep the various players in the process (i.e., parents, caseworkers, the various attorneys involved, and judges) more focused on the permanency planning process and whether this shorter time period would empower judges to hold the parties involved more accountable.

Starting in April 1999, family cases of children who were placed in out-of-home care due to abuse or neglect and in which at least one child was younger than age 12 years were randomly assigned to receive either an accelerated court review whereby their cases would be reviewed every 90 days, or the usual 180-day court review process. Families in the study were alternately assigned to either the accelerated or usual review process based on the order that they appeared in the juvenile court records. Intake for the evaluation took place from April 1999 through October 2001 and outcomes were monitored using court records through December 2002. Eighty children from 62 families were assigned to the accelerated review group, and 77 children from 66 families were assigned to usual review group. All but 7 of the children in the accelerated review group had 90-day reviews in addition to their regular court reviews while they remained in out-of-home care. None of the children in the comparison group had 90-day reviews.

The evaluation findings provide encouraging evidence in support of shortening the time between court reviews to three months. Specifically, being assigned to the accelerated court review was associated with a doubling of the odds of being freed for adoption during the study period, with no reduction in the likelihood of family reunification.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need additional information.

¹ Courtney, M. E. & Blakey, J. (2003). Examination of the impact of increased court review on permanency outcomes for abused and neglected children. *Family Court Review*, Vol. 41(4), 471-479.