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Foster children deserve to have equal access to early childhood education and should not only get the market rate paid to their childcare they should have a higher rate due to their special circumstances. These vulnerable children are going through the scariest time of their young lives and most have trauma and ACE's that require more therapeutic care. Since 2019 to 2023 I cared for 57 foster children and it has opened my eyes to what these little ones suffer with. There are so many things we as a state can do to improve their circumstances.

Many childcares do not accept foster children due to the delayed pay and often "no pay" for their childcare.

The state holds a dual title of being a "parent" for these precious children which would make the state responsible to adhere to a childcare's contract. Yet the state holds an unbalance of power by also being the Authoritative Agency that has complete control over a childcares license. This is the reason that childcare providers stay silent regarding the payment struggles. I testify today that my program hit rock bottom and even went out of business temporarily due to weeks, months and in many cases years of nonpayment for my foster children.

After I raised this issue I finally was reimbursed over \$30,000 of missing foster child payments and the reasons and resistance given by the officer of OCFS at that time was disheartening. I designed my childcare program around accepting all foster children at any given time and even hired a behavior health provider to give the extra attention needed.

Since my attempts to get paid became public, I have not been referred another foster child ever again from OCFS. I went from working with multiple foster families and helping reunify biological families to being alienated completely from any referrals from the OCFS.

I will not give up hope for these little children and for the last seven years I have used a developed childcare business model that works.

In order to help these children in foster care we must prevent them from ever needing to enter into it. To add hopeful optimism for a change, I would like to encourage this honorable committee to inquire further into the concept of how a childcare can stay in business facing so many payment obstacles and be able to have highly qualified staff that can give the trauma informed care that these children and families need.

It can be done, my business model is proof that we can accomplish supporting families and building longer trusting relationships with them. Currently my staff is paid \$24 to \$34 an hour and have free childcare and a free mental health professional offered to them. Every staff member is enrolled in a college course. There is a different quality of care when staff are paid well which reduces the stress in their life and adds motivation to help care for children and families. I have been doing this business model so long that I now have former foster children that are employees at my daycare that enjoy a comfortable income and have a bond with their community. They have childhood memories of laughter even during the storms in their early years of life. This is the beginning of prevention of "their" children entering the foster system.

Building connections and empowering employees is how we can prevent children from entering the system. Prompt payment for childcares for foster children is essential.

Thank you for your kind attention.