

Written Testimony of Danielle Namer
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
In favor of LD 1409, An Act Regarding the Rights of Foster Parents
Sponsor: Representative Griffin
Hearing Date: April 8, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Danielle Namer, and I am a therapeutic resource (foster) parent. I am writing today to **testify in favor of LD 1409, An Act Regarding the Rights of Foster Parents.**

This bill ensures that the meaningful attachment and bonds children develop over time will be honored and valued. This bill would not change the goal and priority of parental reunification. It would not change the filing or requirements of termination of parental rights. I recognize the importance of maintaining biological family connections and I agree that DHHS should look for kin placements whenever possible. What this bill would do, however, is place value on the meaningful and lasting familial bonds that children develop over time when they are placed with a loving family. **When it comes to permanency and placement, children's bonds and attachment to their families should be held in high regard.** Children lose enough being in foster care, they shouldn't have to lose even more because our statutes don't value their connections.

This bill would eliminate tragic situations that happen when children have no voice and are removed from their foster families needlessly if a related adult is found or decides to take placement after a child has been with a foster family for more than one year continuously. Throughout that time, **the child forms a lasting, meaningful and developmentally critical bond.** Poor attachment to caregivers due to moving can impact a child's regulation, growth, developmental and interpersonal relationships through childhood and beyond. Emotional and behavioral dysregulation and difficulty establishing secure relationships can be expected when we do not provide children with stability.

Imagine this – A child is placed in foster care and for the first 6 months, moves 5 times in an effort to find a long-term placement. An adult family member is not identified as a placement option, and the child is placed with a non-related foster family. Over the next two years, the biological parents' rights are terminated. The foster family pursues adoption and as that process moves forward, DHHS notifies them that a relative in Massachusetts has been identified and the child needs to move. The child has little to no relationship with that adult family member, but due to the current statute, that family member has preference over the loving home that the child is currently in. The meaningful relationships the child has formed at school, in the community, and with their foster family have no value. The emotional and behavioral growth they have worked so hard on over the past two years is lost. This isn't acceptable.

I respectfully urge the committee to **support this bill** and to help us better protect the best interests of children in Maine's foster care system.

Thank you, Danielle Namer