

Testimony in Support of LD 869

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Renee Morin and I am here today to speak to you as a grandparent and resource parent in support of LD 869, "An Act to Give Grandparents Intervenor Status in Certain Child Protection Proceedings".

I would like to start with a little history of my family. Both my husband and I were born and raised on Maine and have been married 38 years. We have raised three children and have four grandsons. Our oldest daughter is an Assistant Special Education Director in Massachusetts and our second daughter is a Pediatric Psychiatric Nurse. Needless to say, our family knows about children. Unfortunately, for our first born, a son, we learned the hard way. We learned that our education system did not support his brilliance and therefore, behaviors only seen in school, became his day-to-day self-esteem killer. He became severely addicted to heroin at about 22yrs old. He would cycle in and out of jail and be clean for a bit but would start again very quickly. He never really got clean until age 34; when he was released from Jail on Christmas Eve, he stopped. The next five years were a miracle for our family. He was his old self, funny, kind, and smart. He met a girl who became his wife, he got a great job with a trade union, and he gave us our first grandson. It was wonderful to have our son thriving, as we knew he could. My husband and I were very active in our grandson's life. We were the go to babysitters and life was good. Then came 2020 shutdowns and no more NA meetings. My son and his wife also clean for almost 5 years, decided they were good and could perhaps have a glass of wine with dinner...6 months later they were both using anything they could get: heroin, fentanyl, cocaine. My grandson who was about 18 months when parents relapsed was thrown into a very dangerous world. We filed for guardianship but the process is so cumbersome that DHHS got involved as well. They tried to get the probate court to give us guardianship, but the judge refused to expedite it even though the Department told the judge they would be going to District court to get a Preliminary Protection Order if he did not. A PPO was filed and our grandson was given to us. We continued the guardianship process and were able to get the guardianship by explaining to our son that he would not have to plead to jeopardy. The parents were still heavily using drugs and therefore, agreed to the guardianship. We were hopeful it

would be short term, but after many attempts to get clean and productive, the time stretched into two and a half years. The parents became abusive to us and filed to have our guardianship removed. They knew they could not show they were capable of taking care of our grandson, so they talked the maternal grandfather into filing to replace us as guardian. This grandfather lived in Kansas and saw our grandson 2 to 3 times a year. The Judge ruled in the parents/guardian's favor and said that the maternal grandfather had to live with my grandson in the parent's home to oversee reunification. He agreed to do this, but was back in Kansas two weeks later and left our grandson alone with his parents who were not in any shape to parent. The judge was repeatedly notified of this, but did nothing. My husband and I were supposed to have generous visitation and the maternal grandfather was ordered to support and foster our relationship. This never happened. We saw our grandson very little and had to endure hateful and abusive treatment just to see him. One of the first visits we did get, my grandson said "Memere, why didn't you come get me?" He was ripped from the home he grew to know and love. We got him at 23 months and had him until he was four and a half years old.

I reported to the department that his guardian had left town, nothing happened. I filed contempt with the court, told no standing. I filed for grandparents visitation, told no standing (which is false, since it was the same judge who said in his ruling we had a special bond and relationship that needed to be fostered). Four months later, my son was arrested on drug charges and my daughter-in-law left town with my grandson and drove to Kansas on drugs.

I reported to the department and they said since the child is now in Kansas they could do nothing. Both my daughter and I reported to the department when they returned 6 weeks later. The department opened and closed an investigation. Three weeks after the department closed the investigation, the hospital reported to the department because Mom was so bad the ambulance was called and she was in a medical comma for about a week, several surgeries and paralysis due to IV drug use. My son checked into rehab. The Department called us to come get my grandson. He is now traumatized by the last 8 months he had to live through, but is doing really well and starting to feel safe back with us. However, the Department has started reunification. Reunification with parents who have not effectively parented in almost four

years. Reunification with parents who have not had custody in almost four years. Why? Is this in the best interest of my grandson? Absolutely not!

This brings me to the reason I am in favor of LD 869. Since the Department took custody and placed him with us as a resource family, we have not had access to any information. So much happens without our knowledge or consent. We have been raising this boy for more than half his life and our opinions are not valued. We are treated with disrespect and made to jump through unreasonable hoops. We have *Interested Party Status*, but that only allows us to watch and observe. We have no information regarding the parents and have no idea what the future holds. With *Intervenor Status*, we could have access to all of the information. We recently had a preliminary hearing on jeopardy and although I asked to participate in the workout sessions, I was not allowed. We found out at the hearing that the maternal grandfather who essentially abandoned our grandson was going to have his jeopardy dismissed.

Grandparents are sacrificing their lives every day in Maine and across the country to try and help save the next generation from falling into a system that is not working. Both Child Protective Services and the Judicial System are not focused on the child's safety as they claim. Our case is a very clear case that the child does not matter. If this child has to go back to his parents and live this abuse over and over when he has a strong family network of support, the system is clearly NOT for the child. The Child Protective System is so overwhelmed; they could be rid of this case. Instead, they choose the parents over the child. The child should be first and foremost and until that truly happens; we need laws that support the family that actually have the child's interest at heart. Please strongly consider adding Intervenor Status for Grandparents. Please support LD 869, "An Act to Give Grandparents Intervenor Status in Certain Child Protection Proceedings".

Thanks you for your time.

Sincerely,

Renee Morin

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