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Committees

Commerce & Labor, Chair
Correctional Institutional
Inspection Committee
Higher Education
Primary & Secondary Education
Transportation & Public Safety

Chairman Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 506.

As with much of our legislation, this bill was brought to me by a constituent. My constituent is a foster parent, and she expressed some concerns relating to current Ohio law. Current law states that when a child is taken into custody by children services, and if a child is placed in foster care, they can be removed from that home if a relative wants to care for the child. Ohio's kinship law instructs children's services to give family members first choice in the custody of a child, even if it may not be in the child's best interest. There have been concerns for a child's safety when they are removed from a foster home and placed with a relative they do not know or have never met.

My constituent is a foster mother. She shared with me that she has been fostering a child for two years. Current Ohio law allows a next of kin to claim the child at any time, even if the child does not know the relative. There was a relative of the child that wanted custody of the child, even though the child never met the relative. My constituent is still fostering this child but worries that the child may be placed with a relative at any time, and the placement is not in the best interest of the child.

In Cuyahoga County, there was a case where a three year old child was placed with a relative after being removed from a foster home. The child did not know the relative and died in the relative's care. The child went to the hospital with signs of abuse from the relative. The child went home with the relative even though there were signs of abuse. This story, along with the story I mentioned about my constituent, were covered by News 5 Cleveland.

HB 506 aims to protect children and ensure they are placed in the care that best suits them. I am happy to respond to questions.