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The CEO Project

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Testimony for HB7

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of **House Bill 7 (HB7)**, which proposes free childcare for kinship and foster families. This bill is not just a policy proposal; it is a crucial step toward providing stability, support, and better opportunities for children and families who are already facing immense challenges.

As you know, kinship and foster families play an indispensable role in the lives of children who, for various reasons, are unable to live with their biological parents. These families often step into the role of caregivers without adequate preparation or resources. They bear the immense responsibility of providing a loving, safe, and nurturing environment while simultaneously navigating the complexities of the child welfare system.

The need for free childcare for these families cannot be overstated. For many kinship and foster families, access to affordable and quality childcare can be a major barrier. Without it, they may be forced to make difficult choices between caring for the children in their homes and securing stable employment. Additionally, some foster parents may be unable to access child care that meets the specific emotional, developmental, and trauma-informed needs of the children in their care.

Providing free childcare services for kinship and foster families would:

1. **Promote Family Stability:** Free childcare would alleviate financial pressures, allowing foster and kinship parents to maintain steady employment, access necessary training, or attend support services. This, in turn, promotes stability within the home, which is critical for children who have often experienced trauma.
2. **Support Child Development:** By ensuring access to high-quality, trauma-informed childcare, we can support the healthy development of children placed in foster and kinship care. Research shows that early childhood education plays a key role in cognitive, social, and emotional development, setting the stage for academic success and positive life outcomes.
3. **Improve Outcomes for Children and Families:** When kinship and foster families are adequately supported, children are more likely to thrive in their homes. These children

are more likely to experience a sense of belonging, security, and attachment, which is essential for their long-term well-being. Additionally, parents who are supported with affordable childcare are more likely to stay engaged in services that promote positive family dynamics.

4. **Reduce Financial Strain on Families:** Many foster and kinship families operate on fixed or limited incomes. The added cost of childcare, especially for multiple children or children with special needs, can be an overwhelming financial burden. By covering these costs, the state can relieve these families from one of their greatest financial challenges.

In conclusion, the passage of HB7 as a part of the 2025 Budget will have a profound, positive impact on both foster and kinship families, as well as the children they care for. It is an investment in the well-being of vulnerable children and a recognition of the crucial role that these families play in our society.

Thank you for your time and consideration.