



## **Belmont County Department of Job and Family Services**

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House Children and Human Services Committee  
Proponent testimony on HB 7  
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Good morning, Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee. My name is Jeff Felton, and I am the Director of the Belmont County Department of Job and Family Services, a “quad combined” agency responsible for provision of Public Assistance, Child Support, Workforce, Adult Protective and Children Services Programs to the residents of my county. I am here to offer testimony in support of HB7, which would make foster and kinship parents eligible for publicly funded child care without regard to income. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on an issue so vital to the well-being of vulnerable children and the families who care for them.

Foster and kinship families play a critical role in providing stable, loving homes for children who cannot remain safely in their own homes. These caregivers step in during moments of crisis, often without the time to prepare financially or logistically. Despite their selflessness, foster and kinship families often face significant challenges in accessing affordable, quality child care.

Modest financial support is currently provided to foster and kinship families but many of these caregivers face financial strain involved with raising additional children. Each county public children services agency (PCSA) sets its own per diem paid to licensed foster homes as well as establishes their own policy regarding clothing allowance for children entering care, mileage reimbursement, whether or not they purchase car seats, cribs, etc., for a child entering care. For kinship families who are not licensed, the State provides approximately \$372 per month per child but this financial support is limited to 6 months. As you are well aware, the monthly cost of child care often far exceeds the direct financial support provided to foster and kinship families. More and more two-parent foster and kinship families both work and they frequently exceed the income limits making them ineligible for subsidized child care. This creates a significant financial burden frequently leading the foster or kinship family to be unable to be a placement resource for children who cannot remain safely in their own homes. Providing access to child care without regard to income can help alleviate this burden, enabling caregivers to maintain employment and financial stability and giving them the ability provide abused and neglected children with safe, nurturing, and stable homes.

Eligibility would streamline access to child care by qualifying foster and kinship parents based on their caregiving and work/education status, without regard to income. This policy is both practical and humane, ensuring that resources reach the families who need them most.

I am aware that the increasing cost of publicly funded child care continues to strain available resources, and is unsustainable even in the relative near term (the next few years). There may be other options available to achieve the goal of providing child care to our foster and kinship families; I would gladly do whatever is necessary to assist in examining these efforts.

Foster and kinship parents provide an invaluable service to our communities and the children for whom they care. It is **our** responsibility to support them in every way possible. Implementing eligibility for publicly funded child care is a simple yet profound step toward ensuring that these families can focus on what truly matters: providing love, stability, and hope to the children who need it most.

I urge you to act with urgency and compassion to pass HB 7. Thank you for your time and commitment to supporting foster and kinship families.