

Testimony to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary

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Current foster and adoptive parent

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 216 on behalf of myself

Senate Bill 216 - Dylan's Law

November 8, 2021

Dear Chairman Manning, Vice Chair McColley, and Ranking Member Thomas, Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak with you about SB 216- Dylan's law. This bill is very near and dear to my heart. I am Dylan's foster mother. I had the privilege of bringing him home from the hospital after he was born. He was 5 days old when he was released from the hospital. Dylan was still withdrawing at this time from the drug exposure he endured while in the womb. Before leaving with him at the hospital, I was trained on what to expect during his withdrawals and how to care for him at home.

The next day we went to his pediatrician for his initial visit and then again the following week for a follow up. Dylan had symptoms such as tremors, diarrhea, and repetitive sneezing. He was diagnosed with NAS (Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome) and was most comfortable when he was being held close. He liked to be swaddled in his blanket and rocked.

Dylan was a beautiful baby. He was awake a lot for a newborn and we were together constantly during the twelve days we spent together.

I have brought home three babies from the hospital who have been diagnosed with Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS). This diagnosis is a set of symptoms associated with the abrupt withdrawal of opioids and other drugs when infants are born to mothers who were taking these substances.

The symptoms can range from mild to severe and include:

- Low birth weight
- Breathing problems
- Seizures
- Feeding difficulties (cannot suck a bottle)
- Tremors (trembling)
- Irritability (excessive crying)
- Sleep problems
- High-pitched crying
- Yawning, stuffy nose, and sneezing
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Dehydration
- Sweating
- Fever or unstable temperature

During the time I had with Dylan, I had two visits from our local CPS. These were routine visits and I was told I could expect to foster him for at least 6 months. I was prepared and expecting my time with him to

be a time to help him through his withdrawals and I was hoping to give him the best start possible.

Unfortunately after only 12 days, I got a phone call from CPS telling me that Dylan was going to be reunified with his father after he passed an unmonitored drug test. I knew this was too soon and questioned this decision. They were adamant that this was their decision and told me that I had to bring him to the agency for reunification.

After Dylan was reunited with his father, he lived 2 ½ months. The caseworker had difficulty connecting with the parents and after several postponed visits and missed doctor visits, Dylan spent his last days in danger, hurting and defenseless. He suffered multiple broken bones, drugs were found in his system again after returning home, and then he was thrown away like his life meant nothing. He was found at the bottom of a well months after his death. As someone who loved him and had the privilege to know him, I was completely devastated and so angry when I heard this news.

On his first birthday, he received some justice, when his parents were charged and sentenced for causing his death. Dylan's life can now be honored by changing laws so that no other infant experiences the horrible things he endured. This tragedy should have never happened. A simple monitored drug test could have prevented this. It was later revealed in the trial that the drug test was compromised and was not even his father's urine. This rushed reunification is inexcusable.

What Dylan's law is proposing is that parents who are addicted get the proper treatment to recover and set requirements so they can prove

through completing rehab and monitored drug tests that they are clean and sober and ready to care for their child.

All children long to be loved and protected. Children in foster care have suffered great loss and are defenseless. They have adults making big decisions for them that hold their life in their hands. To support a bill that protects these vulnerable children, would be supporting a safe future for these children. Children need to be reunified only if and when it is safe for them. To rush reunification not only sets up the parents to fail, but it fails the children. No child is removed from their biological home for anything minor. A child is removed because they have suffered great trauma. By moving this bill forward, we would be allowing these children time to work through the trauma and we would also be allowing the biological parent/s time to get healthy and fully recover. No child should ever have to suffer the way Dylan did.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Andrea Tackett