



# Family Building Blocks

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE AND FAMILIES TOGETHER

February 10, 2020



**To: Senate Committee on General Government and Emergency Preparedness**

**From: Patrice Altenhofen, Executive Director, Family Building Blocks**

**Re: SB 1558**



Family Building Blocks is writing in support of SB 1558, which will reinstate a funded Court Care program in Marion and Polk counties. From our experience as the Court Care provider in Polk County for the past three years, we believe this program is essential to ensuring children are in a safe and nurturing environment while parents or guardians attend court proceedings, conduct court-related business, or attend to sensitive personal matters.

Without Court Care, children who are brought to the courthouse are either allowed to stay in courtrooms, exposed to the potentially traumatic details that can be disclosed in legal proceedings, or they are asked to sit in the hallways unattended. Neither option is a good one.



The Court Care program established by HB 3067 in 2017 solved this problem for hundreds of children in Polk County over the past two years. These children were protected from witnessing traumatic court proceedings and allowed litigants, advocates, and court staff to give their full attention to court business. These children were instead cared for in our high-quality early childhood environments being cared for by professionals as they played with their peers. **Parents have expressed sincere gratitude for this resource, some saying it was “life-changing.”**

Court Care also improves access to justice for low-income families. The lack of affordable, quality childcare should not prevent parents and caregivers from complying with mandatory court appearances, obtaining a restraining order, challenging an eviction, or exercising their other legal rights. Court Care provides necessary childcare to allow parents and caregivers to access the courts.



Families served by Family Building Blocks face multiple toxic stressors, such as poverty, incarceration, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental illness. Many end up in the court system at some point. Providing vulnerable families dignified access to justice with the assurance that their children will be safe is vital to breaking negative cycles poverty so often creates.

For these reasons, we encourage you to pass SB 1558. Thank you for your consideration.