

Submitter: Jennifer Kinzey

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services

Measure: SB548

I am a public defender for juvenile dependency cases. Families involved with DHS and the foster care system face not only their own issues, but a lack of service providers that is the worst in the country. Removal causes severe trauma and studies have shown that once a child is removed from their home, they become a statistic. They have to fight to get the same opportunities and outcomes as kids who were never removed. Anything we can do to limit that trauma and help them overcome it is an action we are morally obligated to take. If the State takes responsibility for these kids, takes custody of these kids, they need to AT BARE MINIMUM provide them a duffel bag for their possessions. I heard a lot of words from Senator Steiner and Representative Reynolds about how they helped to pass a huge bill dedicating significant funds to childcare and behavioral health. I can tell you that none of those funds have made a difference on the ground. We have the worst number of behavioral health providers in the country. Families and kids wait months to speak to therapists or counselors. Even when they do, they often have to bounce from counselor to counselor as we cannot retain professionals in these areas. The absolute least this legislature can do is track down a portion of this money for behavioral health and buy a child a duffel bag for their belongings when the State takes them from their home and cannot tell them when or even if they will ever return or see their parents again. And if any legislator needs help determining where the most bang for their legislative dollar is when addressing these issues, please come speak to me- jennifer@myfamilyfirm.com. I would be happy to put together representatives from our current service providers, parent mentors, ODHS caseworkers, and attorneys who can tell you the lived experiences of behavioral health and where we need funding the most.