

April 23, 2023

**House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services Oregon State
Capitol 900 Court St. NE Salem, OR 97301**

Subject: Concerns with Senate Bill 865

Chair Representative Lisa Reynolds, Vice-Chair Representative Hoa Nguyen,
Vice-Chair Representative Anna Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

We are the Gordnes, and we are concerned Oregon residents/Member of the Oregon Resource Family Alliance/ Mom and Dad to a wonderful Son. I am submitting a testimony today about the impact SB 865 have on resource families, relative caregivers, and children in foster care in the State of Oregon.

We always knew we wanted children. We tried to have children for many years, and it only ended in heart break after heart break. However, that didn't deter us. When we were financially and spiritually ready to have children, we signed up to be foster to adopt parents.

Our son was placed with us at just 3 months old. For the next year and half we worked continuously to include his biological family in events, including his 1st birthday party. We also tried to facilitate extra visits for the parents. Unfortunately, for our son his biological parents just couldn't get past their addictions. At age 9 months his parents relinquished their rights.

Our son was on the fast track to be adopted. We had already worked to get our home study done. We had spoke to his worker, his attorney, and attended every court hearing and CRB. The multiple doctors appointments (and there were multiple he had issues with eating because of his failure to thrive when coming into care), advocating for him to be seen by specialist at OHSU, attending every ECI appointment, and his weekly physical therapy to get him to walk we were and are in it for the long haul. By the time the paperwork was filed he had been with us half of his life. By the time the committee came he had made it past the 12-month mark of being with us. In between those appointments and dates there was lots of bonding, family reunions, and lots of prayer. We needed it. Waiting for a group of strangers to a life changing decision based on a homestudy, our powerpoint, and prayers was the worst. We spent many nights praying and some with tears.

However, because of the law that is in effect we were given priority and our son was allowed to stay with us. We kept his first name the same, we have contact with his relatives, he has overcome more obstacles in life than most grown adults, and he is our whole world.

If SB865 were in effect when we adopted our son, we would not have been given priority.

SB865 leaves out, which is critical for caretakers, like us, the timelines. Right now, a caretaker becomes a caretaker if there is a plan for concurrent adoption. This means the day the child is placed in the home the clock starts. The bill removes that language and instead would require the clock to start when the plan is changed to adoption. With the bill there is unintended consequences. This would allow a child who is in a loving home, with caregivers that they are bonded with, to be placed in general adoption because there is no current caretaker or relative priority before 24 months.

The bigger consequence to Oregon is that it almost certainly in every case violates the Federal Adoption for Safe Families Act, which requires states to move children into permanency plans within 12 months from the date of jurisdiction. 12 months is not 24 months even if the clock started when the child came into care.

I have tracked this bill. I let me guard down during the first hearing where it was stated there was too much work to be done on it and much of the bill wasn't going to make it to the floor. However, while not intentional, this was misleading the public. There is much more work that needs to be done in order for SB865 to actually have a positive impact.

The numbers presented are arbitrary numbers with no actual studies that support a child who had a bond with a current caretaker before 24 months would not have impact the child should they be moved to a complete stranger's home. In fact, the ACES study would say differently.

To be effective, the bill would require thoughtful input from the resource parents and relative caregivers. It also would require studies done to ensure that this bill would have the intended impact for children, not adults in the matter.

We recognize that adoption committees have to make tough decisions, but a thoughtful tough decision is better for our children than requiring no decision making as SB865 would do. We also recognize that the current way of doing things

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do need to be changed. However, it should be at the scrutiny of accountability to ensure we are following federal regulations to get children in permanent homes in a timely manner.

Chair Representative Lisa Reynolds, Vice-Chair Representative Hoa Nguyen, Vice-Chair Representative Anna Scharf, and Members of the Committee, thank you for reading my testimony.

Your consideration of these matters and solutions is very much appreciated.

Respectfully,
The Gorden's