

Dear Chair Members of the Committee,

My name is Jonicia Shelton, and I am writing in strong support of SB 912 and SB 736. I have had the opportunity to work in child welfare for over five years as both a Child Protective Services (CPS) Worker and a Teen Worker. Additionally, I have served as a therapist for Guiding Light, where I was responsible for supporting parents who had recently lost custody of their children. My role was to teach these parents how to re-engage with their children prior to reunification.

Through these experiences, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that child welfare involvement has on families—particularly Black families and those experiencing poverty. Many of the families I worked with were investigated or had their children removed not due to abuse or neglect, but due to poverty. Rather than providing adequate resources or support, DHS often remained involved in their lives for extended periods, further destabilizing families. The circumstances surrounding their economic hardship were rarely considered; instead, families were judged based on what was deemed socially acceptable.

Furthermore, Black families were disproportionately impacted. In my experience, Black parents were more likely to have their children removed, received fewer resources, and were given less time and support to reunify compared to their white counterparts. The systemic inequities within child welfare make it clear that reforms are needed to ensure fairness, transparency, and access to information for all parents involved in CPS investigations.

Support for SB 736

SB 736 would mandate DHS to provide parents with a brochure outlining their rights during a CPS investigation. This is a crucial step in ensuring clarity and transparency for families at a time when they are often overwhelmed, confused, and emotionally distressed. Parents deserve to understand their rights and the steps they need to take moving forward. Too often, families are left uninformed and unsupported, which can lead to unnecessary fear, frustration, and prolonged separation from their children. Providing a clear, standardized document explaining parental rights would empower families with the knowledge they need to navigate the system more effectively.

Support for SB 912

In closing, I strongly urge you to support **SB 912 and SB 736** to promote transparency, equity, and fairness within the child welfare system. Families deserve clear communication, access to resources, and a child welfare system that prioritizes keeping families together whenever possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jonicia Shelton