

Testimonial in Support of Senate Bill 912 (The "Need is not Neglect" Bill)

Hello, my name is Tori Algee, and I am the founder of Project Family First, a nonprofit dedicated to reducing the disproportionate representation of Black children in foster care. Before founding PFF, I worked as a child protective services worker for Oregon Child Welfare, where I saw firsthand how the system operates—and where it fails families.

I want to thank the Senate Committee on Human Services for this opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 912, which I often call the "Need is not Neglect" bill.

The majority of children in foster care are there due to allegations of neglect—but too often, “neglect” simply means poverty. Very rarely do parents deliberately withhold needed resources from their children. Typically, they simply can’t afford them. Families struggling with food insecurity, inadequate housing, or lack of affordable childcare don’t need surveillance or punishment; they need real support. Yet, CPS frequently treats poverty itself as evidence of parental unfitness, pulling families into the system instead of helping them meet their basic needs. For this reason, the current neglect definition requires a financial exemption, so parents are not blamed for having limited resources.

A mother working the swing shift knows that leaving her 10-year-old to watch her 2-year-old isn’t ideal—but when childcare is out of reach, she has no other choice. If CPS steps in, she won’t get the support she truly needs. Instead of affordable childcare, she’ll be handed parenting classes and a substantiated allegation that could make it even harder to provide for her family.

She doesn’t need to be taught how to parent—she needs **real solutions** that help her keep her children safe. When we fail to address the root cause—poverty, not neglect—we don’t strengthen families, we weaken them.

Black families are disproportionately impacted by this harmful approach, not because they neglect their children more, but because systemic racism has pushed them into poverty at higher rates. Decades of discriminatory policies have led to underinvestment in Black communities, lower wages, and fewer economic opportunities. Instead of addressing these inequities, CPS punishes struggling families—removing children from loving homes for circumstances that could be solved with financial assistance.

This bill is a crucial step toward **stopping the criminalization of poverty** by ensuring that families are not investigated—or worse, separated—solely because they lack financial resources. Instead of forcing families into CPS involvement, we should be expanding access to housing, food assistance, childcare, and healthcare—the real solutions to family stability.

Passing this bill means protecting families from unnecessary investigations and keeping children where they belong: **at home, with their families, and in their communities.**

Thank you.



Tori Algee
Founder & Executive Director
Project Family First
971.351.8020
www.projectfamilyfirst.org