

Submitter: Tara Griggs
On Behalf Of:
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Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB912
Senator Gelser Blouin
Senate Committee On Human Services

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Support of SB912, Relating to Child Abuse

As a dedicated advocate and nurse, I am writing to express my support for SB912. In August of 2023, I unexpectedly became the primary caregiver to my niece as she was temporarily placed in foster care as a newborn. Her parents—one of whom is my brother—were young and financially unstable, unable to secure housing despite their deep love for their child. This bill is crucial in ensuring that young parents, who lack financial stability, receive the necessary community support and resources to care for their children, rather than facing the devastating reality of family separation due to poverty alone. No child should be removed from their parents because they are struggling financially, especially when support could make the difference between separation and a thriving family.

My brother and his partner's inability to provide a safe home was not due to neglect or lack of effort, but rather a systemic failure to support struggling parents before removal became the only option. Their case was considered a threat of harm case, however her parents were not the threat, it was the environment. As soon as I was made aware of this, I immediately stepped up to provide a safe environment for her until her parents could find a more suitable place to live. While juggling becoming an instant foster mom to a newborn baby I was also tasked with providing shelter for the parents as well as being an advocate for them throughout this whole process. One of the things I did everyday was call 211 and countless other social service agencies. What I found was long waitlists and endless bureaucratic barriers. Had the right resources been available to them, my niece could have remained with her parents from the start. Unfortunately, I had to play sister, aunt, foster-mom, advocate, nurse, and anything else necessary to get the help needed. In the end it was left up to family to shoulder the financial and emotional burden of navigating a system that should have prioritized keeping them together. The environment they were living in before my niece's removal was not one of neglect but one shaped by poverty. I saw firsthand how a lack of financial resources can force young parents into unsafe environments, not because they don't care, but because they have no other options. I

found this to be so challenging and such a disservice to my niece who needed both her parents and a safe place to live.

Having a bill in place that addresses the specific need for financial assistance for children's basic needs is imperative. The state provides services for so many demographics and among them all, children are the most vulnerable. This bill not only prevents children from being placed unnecessarily in the foster care system, but it also ensures that parents accept and utilize the resources provided to build a stable home. More importantly it gives newborns the opportunity to remain with their parents, fostering the critical early attachment that is essential for healthy development. If my brother and his partner were offered public or community resources to obtain safer housing for my niece, I am certain she would not have been placed in foster care. By prioritizing family preservation and ensuring parents receive the support they need, we are not only protecting children but also strengthening entire communities. I'd like to reiterate that I fully support SB912 and find it pivotal to the well-being of all children. Therefore, I urge the committee to pass SB912. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share my written testimony.