

Testimony of Marilyn Egerton
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Public Oversight Hearing
Extending Adoption and Guardianship Subsidies until age 21,
Expanding Guardianship Subsidies to non-kin, and providing
Increased Post-Adoption Supports and Verification Requirements

Before the DC City Council Committee on Human Services
December 12, 2008

Good morning, Chairman Wells and members of the Committee on Human Services. My name is Marilyn Egerton and I am the Deputy Director of the Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center, commonly known as FAPAC. Despite my dedication to FAPAC, however, I am not here today in that capacity. Today I speak to you from my heart as an adoptive parent of four wonderful children from the District child welfare system and as a former foster parent of approximately 20 other children over a 15-year period.

You have heard and will hear organizations testifying today about the philosophical reasons that they have taken strong stands on the three issues that are being examined today. My colleagues and partners can present those perspectives well, so I have chosen to use this time to talk to you about my family....my *whole* family. As foster parents, my husband and I developed a placement "specialty" of sorts. Although this was absolutely not what we

anticipated when we became foster parents, we became one of the rare species of parent who really loved parenting teenagers. I know this may make you think we were a bit strange, but there is nothing like parenting youth at the stage where they are coming into their own identity, forming their own opinions about the world, and engaged in forging paths to self-sufficiency. We found that this fit us, and we have built our family around the joyful chaos that comes from this adolescent energy.

Aside from adopting our four children, there have been others who we have made a life long commitment to and parent to this day, although they are grown adults with families of their own. You might ask us the question, why did we not adopt these other children, if we loved them so much and were willing to be there and continue to be there for them in every possible way? I would like to share with you about a few of my older children and the barriers that prevented us from legally adopting them. To maintain their privacy, I have changed their names for this testimony.

Leon was placed with us when he was 11 years old in what was meant to be a weekend placement while awaiting an opening in a residential treatment facility. The facility was not ready in time, we enrolled him in school while we were waiting, and a temporary placement became a lifetime commitment. However, my husband and I had to make a conscious decision not to adopt Leon because he had intense educational needs that we could not afford to meet.

We made the sad choice not to give him permanency because the price would have been to ruin his chance to access the only educational placement that would ever give him a chance to be self-sufficient. If we could have received an adoption subsidy until he was 21, we could have adopted Johnny and used that subsidy to pay for the high-end school. But we were told this was not an option, and so Leon was deprived of a legal relationship with our family.

We also parented Ned & John. They are birth brothers who were 11 & 12 years old when they joined our family. We wanted to adopt both of them; however they were adamant that although they never wanted to leave our household, they would not agree to adoption because they could not accept severing legal ties with their birth family. Breaking those legal ties would have meant breaking their hopes for a meaningful relationship with their birth family. If it were available, we would have jumped at the chance to become the guardians for Ned & John. Perhaps if we could have started with that level of permanency, we could have even moved them to the point of adoption at a later time. But sadly, this was not an option for us, so they stayed in our home in long-term foster care.

Last, but certainly not least, there was Jason. Jason was 19 when he came to our home. Although we did not know him before we became his foster parents, our relationship grew fast and deep, as did our connection with his birth parents. We would certainly not have encouraged him at 19 to sever legal ties

with his parents, as he was close to them. However, if we could have become his guardians, we would have been excited to do so, and would have included his biological parents into our extended family.

Lastly, I would like to speak about adoption subsidy verification requirements. We could not have afforded to adopt our children without subsidy. Without subsidy we could probably have provided all the children with their basic needs; however, our children deserve much more than that. Subsidy checks in our family are used so that our children can have a life filled with experiences that expand their horizons and increase their options for a good future.

Accepting a subsidy so that I can give our children a better life does not make me any less of a “real” parent. Any form of verification that the District is considering must be focused on assuring that my family continues to maintain the criteria for the subsidy and not on monitoring us as if our children are still in foster care. For if that were to be true, why should families adopt at all?

To keep children safe, a healthy city should make sure that there are services available to meet the special and specific needs of *all* families. That is the District that would make me most proud, and what we should be working together to achieve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

