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*Lori Ross is President and CEO of FosterAdopt Connect, a bi-state nonprofit agency serving foster, kinship and adoptive families and the children they care for. (www.fosteradopt.org). Lori and her husband are also foster parents, originally licensed to foster by SRS in Wyandotte County, KS in August of 1985. She has fostered more than 400 children since that time in Wyandotte and Johnson Counties in Kansas, and in Jackson County in Missouri, working with both public and private agencies.*

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Erin Davis, Chairwoman  
Kansas House Committee on Children and Seniors  
Room 151- S  
State Capitol  
Topeka, KS

#### HB 2751 - SUPPORT

FosterAdopt Connect is a bi-state social service agency serving foster and adoptive families. We were created by foster parents for foster parents.

**With more than 400 Kansas foster, kinship and adoptive families as members of our organization, we are submitting testimony today in support of HB 2751 because we strongly believe that HB 2751 is good for Kansas kids.**

As a longtime child welfare practitioner, and an even longer time foster and adoptive parent, I am abundantly aware of the difficulty of retaining qualified, loving foster and adoptive parents in Kansas and throughout the United States. The issue has been discussed at length in the Legislative Task Force currently meeting to work on our foster care and adoption issues, and in the press. Many of the problems facing the state are as a result of being unable to recruit and retain an adequate number of qualified foster homes.

The most important factor in determining whether a foster family remains active, or exits the foster care system, is whether or not they feel that their voices are heard on behalf of the children they care for in their homes. Anything that the state of Kansas can do to improve the engagement with, and respect of, foster caregivers will increase foster parent retention.

As we originally began sharing with the Kansas Legislature in 2013, we have heard repeatedly that many foster parents can feel disconnected from information, unsupported in terms of their experience with the agencies who supervise the placement of children in their homes, and afraid of rocking the boat in any way for fear of retaliation.

#### *Our Mission*

*“To provide foster and adoptive children a stable, loving and nurturing family environment by support and advocacy for abused and neglected children and the families caring for them.”*

Since that time, DCF responded by creating a ‘Statement of Foster Parent Rights.’ At the same time they created the Ombudsman position within DCF, which was an attempt to address foster parent concerns.

Because of the Ombudsman’s position within DCF, foster parents have expressed concerns to us that there is no separate and outside oversight or opportunity for accountability because an internal Ombudsman is, in effect, DCF’s effort to police itself. And, in practice, when foster parents have called the Ombudsman, often times their experience has been that the Ombudsman’s office has simply referred those issues right back to the agencies which are the subject of the report without any significant investigation or independent findings.

**This bill creates a much needed separate entity, which can serve to provide foster parents with an opportunity to raise their concerns about any of the many systems or practitioners who interact with a child in foster care, to a level in which they can be heard and investigated by an independent entity. It also creates processes by which either individual concerns or trends can be channeled into needed changes in policy or recommendations for changes in law.**

FosterAdopt Connect strongly supports the creation of the Office of the Child Advocate for Children’s Protection and Services, and believes that this office will improve outcomes in terms of foster parent retention.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Ross  
President and CEO  
FosterAdopt Connect

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