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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILD WELFARE AND FOSTER CARE Feb 8 2023 Testimony – HB2299

Chair Concannon, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Ousley, and Members of the Committee, my name is Kristalle Hedrick, Vice President of Kansas Programs with FosterAdopt Connect. FosterAdopt Connect (FAC) is a nonprofit, human service organization founded by foster and adoptive families in 2000. FAC exists to provide advocacy and unique programming directed at supporting youth impacted by foster care and the families who care for them. We focus on filling system gaps and developing policy to create a more caring and effective child welfare system.

FosterAdopt Connect is recognized locally and nationally as an expert in assisting foster and adoptive families to navigate the challenges related to caring for children who come from hard places. By employing staff with extensive professional child welfare experience as well as lived experience (foster/adoptive parents, people who experienced foster care as children, and people who grew up in families that fostered/adopted), our team is able to recognize the needs of families and develop innovative solutions to address their challenges.

FosterAdopt Connect appreciates the effort of the committee dedicating time and attention to the complex issues that can arise in pursuit of what is truly in the best interest of children as it pertains to permanency through adoption. For years, practitioners across the country and here in Kansas have been conversing about the complexity of adoption from foster care. What we know is that complex situations require complex solutions. HB2299 is a step in the right direction in terms of ensuring we continue to focus on the best interest of a child in regards to biological and sibling connections, as well as considering the value of safety and connection in existing caregiver relationships.

HB2299 supports and encourages those who, in theory, know the child well – court professionals, case managers, therapists, caregivers, advocates – to truly consider what is in the best interest of the child, without making an assumption that biological connections are always in the best interest of the child. HB2299 solidifies that the sense of safety and belonging with primary caregiver(s) can be the foundation some children need to heal from their trauma.

HB2299 does not relieve us of our responsibility to prioritize and facilitate safe and supportive relationships with biological family members. It does challenge us to seek out and establish these connections early on through family finding, supporting and encouraging relative/kin placements, facilitating visitation, and timely engagement in the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) process. These relationships should be pursued not only



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between the children and their kin, but also between caregivers and kin. Foster parents should never question the role of a safe biological family member, or the path to permanency through these relationships. Reflection on policy, practice, and training throughout all limbs of the child welfare system will need to occur as prescribed in HB2299.

There may be unintended consequences to the appeal components of HB2299. There is likely value in creating a path to appeal, for any potential adoptive family; however, doing so would require additional time to gather, analyze, and interpret data to ensure we are informed and developing policy that promotes timely permanency and reduces instability for our children. FAC would recommend passing HB2299 without the appeal provision at this time.

I look forward to work with committee members to explore opportunities to further strengthen our work for children and families. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

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