

MARGUERITE CURSON

**Pennsylvania Council for Children, Youth, and Family Services'  
Testimony**

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The Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services is an alliance of over 100 private, nonprofit child welfare agencies serving children and families across Pennsylvania. The Council's mission is to enhance the ability of member agencies to improve the quality of children's and families' lives in our communities. Representing our member agencies, the Council would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bills 1533 and 1838. We commend the House on their work and are pleased this public hearing was scheduled to discuss critical issues affecting the well being of Pennsylvania's children.

On any given day our member agencies serve thousand of children and families through in-home supports, foster care, residential services, outpatient treatment programs, alternative educational programs, and adoption services. The majority of children served by Council member agencies are dependent children who were placed in substitute care (foster care, kinship care, or residential care) because of findings of abuse and neglect. Most children in the dependency system do return to their parents' homes. However, when reunification does not occur, county children and youth agencies initiate the process of terminating parental rights so children will be able to find permanent homes. Council member agencies work diligently to find these children adoptive families where they will thrive.

The primary goal of the child welfare system, as embodied by the 1997 federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, is to ensure that children are returned to safe and permanent homes in a timely manner. The recognition of the adverse effects of living in a "state of impermanence" can have on children was the impetus for the federal legislation. House Bills 1533 and 1838 address the barriers to children achieving permanency by limiting to 30 days the time birth parents have to revoke their consent to adoption. This time limit would remedy the current open ended time period that permits birth parents to revoke their consent to adoption for any reason and any time prior to either the court's final adoption decree or the court's termination of

parental rights, whichever occurs first. Pennsylvania clearly lags behind many of our neighboring states, which have established clear time limits for the revocation of consent to adopt.

Our General Assembly has recognized the need to take steps to change our current laws. The Joint State Government Commission Advisory Committee on Adoption Law was convened through a concurrent resolution, adopted by both the House and the Senate, to establish a task force and advisory committee to study the Commonwealth's adoption law and make recommendations regarding the law to the General Assembly. Since 1998, the Advisory Committee has been reviewing the entire Adoption Act. The Committee is currently preparing suggested legislative amendments that will address many of the issues raised today, including relinquishment of parental rights, rights of putative fathers, and adoption counseling. By analyzing recommended changes in the context of the entire Act, the Advisory Committee hopes to avoid recommendations not having their intended effect. It is our understanding that the Advisory Committee's recommendations are forthcoming.

While the Council agrees with the principles underlying House Bills 1533 and 1838 and commend the drafters for their work, we will respectfully reserve support until we have had the opportunity to review the recommendations from the Joint State Government Commission Advisory Committee on Adoption Law to ensure consistent policy changes.

Thank you again for this opportunity.