



September 28, 2021

The Honorable Representative Michael J. Finn  
House Chair  
Joint Committee on Children, Families, and  
Persons with Disabilities

The Honorable Senator Adam Gomez  
Senate Chair  
Joint Committee on Children, Families, and  
Persons with Disabilities

Dear Chair Finn, Chair Gomez, and Committee members,

In The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide non-profit association of over 60 private and public organizations and individuals that collectively advocate for public policies and quality services that are in the best interest of the Commonwealth's children, youth and families. It is through public education and advocacy that CLM promotes the availability, accessibility, and quality of these needed services. Our members, who comprise providers, advocates, and regulators of services, know first-hand the struggles that children and their families face in the Commonwealth. In particular, our Adoption Task Force comprises experts on strategies to address permanency through adoption for youth in the DCF system, and provides long-term sustainability for families through professional and natural support networks and life-long connections.

We are writing to testify **in support of An act to expand access to adoption (H.243/S.123)**, which removes an arbitrary ban on adoptions by some extended kin.

Under current law, family members in Massachusetts are prohibited from adopting their younger siblings, aunts or uncles, even when the older family member is independent, stable, and can financially support the child. Guardianships are available for family members, but only provide temporary caregiving support, while adoptions are permanent and create greater stability for the child – a key determinant of their mental and emotional well-being. This legislation provides a simple fix to the current law by allowing for extended kin to permanently adopt family members when it is in the child's best interest.

Research demonstrates that children do best when families stay together. When it becomes necessary to remove a child from their biological parents, keeping family connections is essential to the child's mental and emotional health and well-being, as well as their sense of safety, stability, and belonging. As stated in a recent publication from the Children's Bureau:

*Placing children with relatives helps to maintain family connections and cultural traditions that can minimize the trauma of family separation and relieve the anxieties that come with traditional foster placements. This creates a safe space while parents get the help they need to enhance their caregiving skills. Kinship care can be a lifeline for both children and parents, as placement with a family member can create a sense of belonging for a child and comfort for a parent in knowing the child is not with strangers. Parents may feel more encouraged to seek help with the support of family members. By providing children with a familiar environment and their parents with family support, kinship care creates several protective factors that can strengthen families and keep them together (e.g., maintaining family connections, enhancing the social and emotional competence of children, and boosting resilience in parents and children).<sup>1</sup>*

Further research demonstrates the benefits to children placed with kin when compared directly to non-kinship care. For example, “one study suggested that regardless of the stability of their placement history, children in kinship care may be as much as 50% less likely to exhibit behavioral problems several years after placement compared with children in non-kin foster care.”<sup>2</sup>

DCF has taken steps to increase kinship placements in foster homes, and this legislation would support using those placements as a step to permanency, with the added benefits of maintaining family connections and without the trauma of moving children among multiple foster homes.

*Since January 2018, the placement of children kinship foster homes immediately following the home removal increased 75% statewide and 160% in the Family Find offices. In FY2020, 57% of all children in departmental foster care were initially placed with kin...and the overall kinship placement rate for all children (0-17) in out-of-home placement (of any type) was 38.1%. Increasing the placement of siblings in the same foster home and adding in-home services for foster parents influenced placement stability.<sup>3</sup>*

More importantly, expanded kinship adoption is a direct and simple strategy to mitigate the disproportionality in adoptions. According to DCF data, white children were twice as likely to be adopted as Black and Hispanic children in FY2020, despite these groups being nearly equal in having

<sup>1</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). *Partnering with relatives to promote reunification*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

<sup>2</sup> Rubin D, Springer SH, Zlotnik S, et al. Needs of Kinship Care Families and Pediatric Practice. *Pediatrics*. 2017;139(4).

<sup>3</sup> DCF Annual Report 2020, p. vii.

adoption as a permanency plan.<sup>4</sup> Expanding kinship adoption would increase the likelihood that minority children with adoption as a permanency goal are able to find culturally relevant forever homes.

The need for adoptive families has only increased over time. In FY2020, there were 3,244 children age 0-17 in Massachusetts in DCF care with a permanency goal of adoption—39% of all children in placement. This percentage has grown over time (from 33% in FY16 to 39% in FY20), even as the overall number of children in DCF placement with a permanency plan has decreased 13% over the same time period.<sup>5</sup>

In short, with more children waiting for adoption, and minority children disproportionately impacted by adoption delays, expanding access to adoption is a simple fix. Moreover, kinship adoptions offer the most healthy and stable option for many children, contributing to overall stability and long-term positive outcomes.

We ask that you vote this bill out favorably and work diligently for its passage without delay.

Sincerely,



Tammy Mello  
Executive Director  
Children's League of Massachusetts

**Endorsing Members of the CLM Adoption Task Force**

Cambridge Family & Children's Service

Child & Family Services, Inc.

Massachusetts Adoption Research Exchange (MARE)

Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC)

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<sup>4</sup> DCF Annual Report 2020, Tables 15a and 35.

<sup>5</sup> DCF Annual Report FY2020, Table 15.