

**Madam Chair Michaelson Jenet,
and esteemed members of the committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is Heather Williamson, representing myself, and I am here in support of HB 22-1113.

I come to you today from the Western Slope. I am a first-generation college graduate and hold my degree in Psychology, with an emphasis in Social and Developmental Psych.

I currently serve as a board member for CASA of Mesa County, although I want to make it clear that I am not here to represent CASA, I am here solely to present my individual testimony.

I have been blessed to serve children in my community as a foster mom since 2014, and entered into the realm of foster-to-adopt in 2019.

My primary reason for my being here today is to represent those foster children at the mercy of their circumstances. Speaking from personal experience I have seen that the children in limbo, awaiting an appellate court hearing are those who truly suffer the most.

These children, who have no choice, and often no say in the direction of their lives, are tasked with many responsibilities.

They are made to learn, grow and develop relationships at school, things that are often outside of their wheelhouse of social, developmental, and emotional skills.

They are asked to develop relationships at home, are introduced to new ways of life, and asked to acclimate themselves. All while facing the all too real possibility that they will be moved to a new home, as happened to my son five times in the year before he came to me.

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February 22, 2022

Page 2

They are asked to meet their milestones, all while having no sense of permanency, no true place or home to belong to, or so they feel.

As an adult, we are hard pressed to remember the pressures of school and learning. Learning while in limbo becomes an almost impossible task.

We also have a hard time remembering how little we knew as children, and how much we relied of the guidance of adults around us to direct our paths. Children in foster care are reliant upon a series of individuals at the mercy of the court system to bring them permanency in the timely manner that they so desperately deserve.

I'm here today, 509 days having passed since my son was placed with us. 207 of those days spent waiting for an appellate hearing. Expected to learn and grow and function at his very best, but unable to. Simply because he does not have permanency. It doesn't matter how many times I tell him I love him and want to keep him forever. Until the day he is adopted he will wonder, and he will struggle with regressive behaviors, and he will question if we really do want him. Because until now, that's the only life he has known.

As a foster parent, the delay is hard to cope with. I do not share my fears, my anxieties, and my exhaustion with my children. As a foster parent, you take those blows for them. But after 8 years of emotional struggles and waiting for momentum that never comes, I am exhausted.

I find myself having a harder time advocating to those I know and love to become foster parents, and that is truly the saddest part for me to come to terms with. Please, on behalf of these children, on behalf of foster parents, and on behalf of the biological parents stuck in limbo as well, I urge you to pass this bill.

With my sincerest appreciation, I thank you for your time, and may you be blessed.