

Melanie Borges
131 Federal St
Providence RI 02903
melborges@aol.com
401-413-3583

Chairman Marszalkowski and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Human Resources,

My name is Melanie Borges, I am currently a licensed traditional foster parent. I have two biological children, and a placement of a preteen girl that has been with me for the past four years. I have provided care for numerous children in my community throughout the years, and continue to provide respite for families and children that are in need.

My Journey with RI DCYF began four years ago when I signed up for the weekend training that was held at the RI Convention Center. The families that attended were encouraged to peer up with an agency, an agency would have the ability to provide another layer of support. The agency I began with is not the agency I am currently with. I currently work with Devereux Therapeutic Services and they have proven to be an asset for our family. They provide valuable training, twenty four hour on call services, weekly home visits, newsletters and activities that promote normalcy, as well as a caring compassionate staff that go above and beyond.

Good families need to feel supported! While it is crucial to recruit families, I often say it is just as crucial to maintain the families that are already licensed. I will see my current placement through, however I will not do this again!

It makes me sad to say that because I have a lot to offer to a child that is in need of a safe, stable, healthy environment. I am trained, I am experienced, I advocate, I support, I am resourceful and I am knowledgeable.

I would like to address the Level of Need which is a generic scale used to categorize children in care and pay accordingly. The majority of Children enter into placement as a level one or two. The stipend we receive is meant to offset the cost of the basics: food, clothing, travel, and daily needs. The scale provides a starting point, but in my experience, and in speaking with other families, many children are experiencing significant trauma and their needs are intense. I would like to take a minute to provide you with a quick snapshot: A child enters into care, the child presents as scared and unsure, after a few weeks the child finds a sense of comfort and security with their Foster Family they begin to exhibit certain behaviors or trauma responses, this affects school, after school programs, and/or summer camp. The Foster Parent is the contact, therefore they are called in to provide support. The Foster Parent loses wages, a mental health specialist needs to be located, and this is not easy to do, a bio parent needs to provide consent, numerous appointments are needed to diagnose and potentially treat, and this could take months. In the meantime the Foster Parent is receiving \$27 per day to care for this child.

Considering that many of the children have endured abuse, neglect and trauma, it is imperative that wrap-around services are available. Children should not be put on a two month wait list or have to wait a month for a bed in a hospital before a spot opens up at a facility that can support their mental health needs. Prior to the pandemic it was difficult to access these services, now it's nearly impossible to find the help that we need. An investment in Clinicians, Behavioral Health Specialists, EOS , HBTS and PASS would be helpful to Foster Families. A need to support and retain these professionals would be cost effective and could ease the burden in the long run.

The children that we care for want to feel a sense of normalcy, they deserve to fit in! I have had children come to me with nothing more than the clothing on their back. I utilize and hold close to my heart agencies like Foster Forward and Clothes to Kids, where I have been able to go in and find gently used clothing that can get us started but it would be wonderful for these children to have new clothes,

essentials, personal hygiene items, and school supplies, which help promote a sense of self esteem. It would be extremely helpful to have clothing vouchers so that we can continue to support their constantly changing needs.

The stipend that we receive does not provide for the extras and I have spent numerous hours writing pleas for scholarship money for different activities. The children in my care have participated in baseball, football, softball, dance, art camp, horseback riding, swim lessons, bike camp and cheerleading. We just returned from Universal Studios in Florida where my cheerleader won a national championship with her team, a local inner city team. She never thought she would have an opportunity like this, and broke into pieces. This took enormous commitment and money on my part to get her there. Beside these activities promoting health and wellness, they encourage a sense of community and promote healthy relationships. I understand that these extra curricular activities go beyond basic human needs but they are imperative to providing normalcy and life skills.

I recently spearheaded a group that meets bi monthly to discuss how to access resources which include but are not limited to summer camps, mental health services, clothing, respite, extra curricular activities and educational needs. I am inspired by the families that come together to share their successes and failures so that we could continue to provide the best possible outcomes for the children in our care. I also participate on the Parent Advisory Board that has been created by the staff at DCYF exclusively for Foster Parents. It is an open forum that encourages an unbiased opportunity for families to come together and voice concerns that will help the Department navigate which support may be needed for their Foster Families. While there is a lot of work to be done in many areas of child welfare, directly supporting the needs of the families that work tirelessly, twenty fours hours a day, seven days a week caring for the most vulnerable would be a great investment.

Sincerely,
Melanie Borges

