

Good morning!

My husband and I have 7 amazing children, 4 biological and 3 adopted, and we need your help. Having been members of the foster and adoptive community for over 18 years, we actually attended our first ever VFAFA conference this weekend! You may wonder why, after so many years, we finally decided to attend this amazing conference. It wasn't an easy sell for my husband, I can assure you of that. But our two youngest adoptive kiddos suffer from pretty severe trauma histories and we were in need of some serious support. I can't count on both hands and feet the number of times we have doubted our decision to adopt and have thought "we are not the right parents for these kiddos". It's been a VERY rough road for one we are worn down from traveling. This weekend was not only very informative from the wonderful presenters, but also we finally felt connection to other parents who get it, REALLY get it. Our system is so broken that it is allowing for some pretty serious damage to be done to our kids - our future leaders. We finally don't feel alone in the sea of crazy that is our daily lives.

My email to you isn't to share with you our woes, or even to complain about the MANY things that should have been done differently for our family, but rather to ask for your help with 3 specific things.

1. You MUST support the continued efforts of VFAFA and the annual conference. I am not even slightly exaggerating when I say to you we both feel 50 pounds lighter after this weekend and have an entire new bucket of tools to help us navigate raising our two kids of trauma backgrounds. The cost of this conference is FAR out weighed by the benefits for just OUR ONE FAMILY, not to mention the hundreds of others that attended. Without parents to raise these kiddos to rise above the damage of their birth families, to be strong and productive adults that will one day be guiding the path for others around them, these kids will be lost souls that end up in and out of our court and correction systems. These damaged kids will one day most likely be parents themselves, and without the love and support from healthy and connected parents they won't know how to break the cycle of destruction. We, as those parents, need support - and this conference offered us a piece of that pie that we had previously not found.

2. You must REALLY think about the formalization of the post-adoptive agreement before you break a process that is not broken as is. Currently, each agreement is a legal document between the state and the adoptive parents specific to what THAT child and THAT family needs. Formalizing the agreement process is likely to change the ability to customize the agreement for a specific family's needs. Adopting kids with very special needs is already very draining on families. We do it because we love the kids and want to make their life better, but sometimes there are barriers that can't be reached on our own. Being able to access specific assistance is IMPERATIVE to the family's success.

3. I apologize for not having the correct name, but I believe it was something like Legislation L90 or T90, which is currently a vague law allowing for anyone that knowingly allows a child to be in harm's way to be criminally charged. WAY too broad of a law - and here is why:

Lets say I'm a foster parent to a 5 year old girl where I am not protected from criminal charged by my "job" the way the DCF, Lawyers and judges are. The COURT has ordered visitation with the birth parent mom. The birth mom has a very good public defender who has made argument that because no physical abuse was documented the visits should be unsupervised, and the judge with their limited first hand knowledge has agreed to have the visits happen at DCF. This parent is battling drug addiction and often shows up late, never bring snacks for the 4 hour visit, says very hurtful and/or damaging things during their visit to undermine the connection between the child and the foster family (i.e. "she isn't your mother and you do don't have to listen to her", or "did the wonderful people that are taking care of you give you this stupid thing") and birth mom almost always needs to leave early. After the visits the child is unruly telling adults around her "I don't have to listen to you", she has night tremors, wets the bed, refuses to eat, swears and slaps other kids and adults. This goes on for MONTHS, and even though everyone around can see this is putting the long term mental and emotional welfare (and frankly even the short term) of that child at risk, all parties continue the visit because the court has mandated it. Here you have a set of foster parents and the DCF worker all knowingly putting that child in harms way. Not physical harm, but mental and emotional harm non-the-less. A Criminal charge under the current broad umbrella could see this foster family charged criminally

Heck, with this broad of a law sending your child on a ride at the fair could be deemed illegal since we all know there is a certain amount of risk involved when entering a ride held together with cotter pins - but that doesn't mean we should be charged with a crime.

This law is way, WAY to vague. I can promise you I am completely on board with laws that will help protect our children, but not when the cost will inevitable be adults that were trying to make a difference in a kiddos life in a positive way ending up in the defendants seat

I thank you each for your time as I know you are extremely busy people. I also know everyone has the "not in my pocket" attitude when it comes to budget cuts and this is not an easy time for anyone. But as foster and adoptive parents I can tell you we are already strapped to our breaking point on many levels. We must be careful where we tread or we could have a much bigger issue on our hands - like where to send kids when we have no more foster/adoptive parents available. There seems to be some crazy notion that you make money as a foster parent and I am here to tell you that I work a full time job, plus 2 part time jobs to support my adoptive kiddos (my 4 bio kids are all 18+ years old). We are in the red each month and are NOT getting rich helping. We do it because we care!!

Have a great day!

Stacey L. Mumley
Team Leader, EPS Inc.

Happiness is an attitude. We either make ourselves miserable, or happy and strong. The amount of work is the same.”