

Dear House Human Services Committee members,

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on S.280. For the benefit of those who were unable to attend and to summarize the major points of my testimony, I ask you to consider the following recommendations:

Change the name to something that reflects the purpose of the advisory council, which is to address the issues of child and family poverty. "Strengthening Families" implies to me that the causes of poverty are weak families, ignoring the many factors and situations that result in families living in poverty. Many strong families live in poverty, too.

Give the council a very clear charge to address three aspects of poverty:

1. The economic factors that contribute to poverty, including low wages, tax policies, availability of decent paying jobs, access to paid leave, etc.
2. The safety net issues that provide assistance for the bare necessities of survival, including food, shelter, health care transportation, and child care. This should include understanding the aspects of the system (or lack thereof) that result in disincentives and barriers to getting ahead, i.e. the so-called benefits cliff. (These are the issues that are most often studied and addressed, leading to reports that are a listing of programs that could help more if there is more money available.)
3. The many underlying causes of poverty. This would be a focus on helping people get out of poverty by getting away from just addressing symptoms, as important as that is for survival, to getting at root causes. Factors here often include poor brain development of children living in poverty, trauma, poor educational outcomes, mental health or substance abuse issues, poor physical health, generational poverty, and many others. The Agency of Human Services should be tasked with being a partner with the council to develop systems that are individual and family centered rather than simply siloed service delivery.

I appreciate the committee's continued interest in helping reduce poverty and mitigating the lasting impacts of poverty on children. I remain available to help in any way.

Thank you.

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