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Senate District 22



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News Release: June 24, 2015

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Senate Passes Foster Care Legislation to Add Fairness in Adoption Process

(Salem) A measure to add fairness and flexibility in the adoption process for long-term foster parents was adopted in the Oregon Senate today. [Senate Bill 741](#) was spearheaded by [State Senator Chip Shields](#) (D-Portland) and [State Representative Duane Stark](#) (R-Grants Pass), who both have person experience as foster parents.

“Adoption decisions should be based on what’s best for the child,” said Senator Shields. “Under the current system relatives almost always get preference over a foster family, even if that family is the only one the child has ever known and may have been with them for several years and formed a significant bond.”

SB 741 requires the Department of Human Services to give relatives and current caretakers (usually foster parents who have cared for a child for a year or more) equal status when considering them as prospective adoptive parents. State policies have changed over the past eight years because there were many cases where foster families trumped biological relatives.

“My goal is to swing the pendulum toward the middle,” explained Representative Stark. “I am not saying a foster parent should have preference over relatives, just get equal consideration as a viable option. It’s important to look at the individual needs of each child regarding their safety and well-being.”

Denise Loraditch from Grants Pass brought home her foster daughter when she was just two days old. Now at 22 months old, the girl is likely to be adopted by a California couple who adopted the girl’s brother several years ago. After learning about the bill passing Loraditch said “This little girl is adored by our entire family, but because we are not ‘relatives’ we don’t even get an option to be considered for her forever home. We hope this new law will help other families like ours in the future.”

“As advocates for children in Oregon’s foster care system for the last four decades, we are steadfast in our view that decision-making should be guided by the child’s best interests, including the child’s current and future needs,” said Mark McKechnie, executive director of [Youth, Rights & Justice](#). “SB 741 is about making the best choice for each child, period. We should consider all good options and choose the best - in every case. We applaud Representative Stark, Senator Shields, and [Senator Sara Gelser](#) for their tireless work to make this idea a reality.”

Last year there were an average of 7,800 foster children being cared for in one of the 4,000 certified foster homes across the state according to the Oregon Department of Human Services. Senator Shields and Representative Stark have worked on a series of bills this legislative session related to [foster families](#) including [Senate Bill 632](#) which awaits action in the Joint Committee on Ways and Means. House Bills [2889](#) and [2890](#) were recently signed into law by Governor Brown which assist foster children with savings accounts and extracurricular activities.