



The Children's Hospital

March 10, 2009

To: State of Colorado Senate Health & Human Services Committee

RE: HB1139

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Dr. Nicole Tartaglia and I am a pediatrician specializing in the treatment of children with neurodevelopmental disorders. I am part of the faculty of the CU School of Medicine in the Department of Pediatrics, and I practice at The Children's Hospital. As a specialist in developmental and behavioral problems in children, I diagnose and treat children and adolescents with FASD, and see the impacts on patients and families on a regular basis in my clinic.

I wish I could be there today to testify in support of this bill, because there is a great need in the State of Colorado to increase awareness of and services for this very important, devastating, and expensive disorder. As you have heard today, prenatal exposure to alcohol impacts brain development, and leads to a variety of health and neurodevelopmental problems.

In addition to chronic medical problems such as congenital heart malformations or kidney defects, it also causes developmental delays, learning disabilities, and mental retardation. Often more significant are the behavioral and mental health problems including problems with attention span and impulsivity, problems with behavioral regulation, and poor judgment and social skills. These lead to problems in daily life in the school setting, in relationships with peers and family, many accidents and injuries, and a vulnerability to getting into trouble with the legal system.

I thought I would share a story from one of my patients that occurred last month:

The patient is a little 5 year old girl named Kathy who has FAS. Kathy was placed into foster care at about 2 years of age after the rights of her biological parents were terminated due to neglect. She's a little girl who needs a lot of care because, not only does she have FAS, she also has cystic fibrosis, which as you know is a chronic lung disease that requires a lot of daily pulmonary treatments, nutritional care and frequent medical appointments. After being taken away from her parents, she had been in two foster care settings and was finally in a foster-adopt home that was working very hard to care for her medical and behavioral needs.

Kathy is 5, but she's about 2 years behind in her speech and motor development. She's also very impulsive and hyperactive, with frequent severe tantrums that can happen multiple times per day without a clear trigger. The potential adoptive mother tried very hard to help Kathy - she'd

gone to many different types of therapies including speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral therapy and had strong parenting skills.

A few weeks ago I received news from the social worker that the potential adoptive mom had asked Kathy to be placed in another foster home, and that she couldn't go through with the adoption. When we spoke with the woman who was planning on adopting her, it wasn't the chronic medical condition or care that she was concerned about, but the cognitive and behavioral effects of FAS that were impacting her existing family and that didn't seem to be improving. She actually said to me, "Dr. T., Cystic fibrosis is a piece of cake compared to FAS!" That is a very powerful statement when you think about the severity and chronic, daily care needed in cystic fibrosis.

Kathy is now back in the foster care system. I'm very worried about her outcome since she needs a stable and supportive environment for her medical needs and to support her development and her emotional health.

As you've already heard today, **FASD is the number one preventable cause of mental retardation / intellectual disability in Colorado and in the nation, it leads to significant impacts on the individual, the family, the health care system, and other state-funded programs such as the early intervention programs, special education programs, adult developmental disability services and the juvenile and adult justice systems.**

I enthusiastically support this bill and other future attempts to increase awareness of FASD, to encourage prevention, and to increase support for this disorder in Colorado.

Sincerely,

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