

(This was published in the Bonner County Daily Bee as an opinion piece)

While we should “remember the kids” every month, April is the month for especially remembering those children whose lives are touched by violence, abuse, and/or neglect. One of the growing trends today is grandparents and other relatives who are raising minor children. Children can come into the care of relatives for many reasons, death of a parent, financial insecurities, teen pregnancy, incarceration (for any of many reasons), and yes, even abuse and neglect.

Nearly 15,000 children across the country now living in foster care could leave foster care and live permanently with relatives if federal support was available to help with their care, as is now available for many foster parents who adopt children. Currently, relatives who become legal guardians to care for foster children permanently cannot receive the continuing financial assistance they need to help provide for the children they are raising. We feel this is grossly unfair. It is time for reform. **Now**. Congressmen Jim McDermott (Washington) and Danny Davis (Illinois) have stepped up to the plate. Other Congressional leaders are signing on as time passes. A bi-Partisan bill (S661/HR1288, commonly known as the “Kinship Caregiver Support Act”) is being prepared that would give guardianship of children by relatives the support they need, allowing these kids to leave the foster care system for good. This bill will recognize both non-relative *and* relative foster families, giving support and access to resources not available currently to many caregivers who also happen to be grandparents, aunts, or uncles related by blood. Every child deserves a “forever family” -- a family they will not “age out” of and studies have shown that children do much better in situations where they feel secure in the knowledge that they will be with the same family for years to come. I **urge** you to google this bill and **give it the support it deserves**. A great place to start is: www.kidsarewaiting.org.

Obviously, there is still a need for traditional foster care. Many children do not have the relative resource that can provide them a loving home. For these, foster and/or adoption is the only solution. Across the state, and in fact the nation, there is an overwhelming need for foster homes to match kids with. Again, while I am not denigrating the group home settings, children, particularly young ones, do much better when they are part of a loving family committed to giving them the attention, love, and many times specialized care that they need.

A few years ago I was appointed by Governor Kempthorne as Board Member from Region One (northern Idaho) to the Idaho Children’s Trust Fund. Our legislative appointed mission is to support programs designed to prevent the spread of Child Abuse/Neglect throughout the state. I feel honored to serve in this capacity, but there is much work to do and we need everyone’s help. One way you can help is to become involved as community partners to stop abuse where it is found. Or you can become active in a larger way. My wife Judy and I are currently in Washington DC with people from other states supporting S661/HR1288 as advocates in meetings with United States Congressional Leaders. We appreciate the time they have taken to listen to our opinions. And along with our own 3 children (now grown), we have also been state licensed foster parents to many other children over the last 18 years. If your heart is touched you can help by becoming informed and then telling your state leaders that we need the reform that S661/HR1288 addresses. **Now**. The future of our great country is it’s youngest citizens. We **must** support this Childcare reform. And if you feel you could open your home and hearts to children less fortunate, we encourage you to look into it. The easy part is picking up the telephone and calling your department of Health and Welfare. I can assure you that there are many emotional rewards. And I promise you that it’s worth it.

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