



## HD936, An Act to Improve Permanency and Placement Stability

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### What Is Permanency?

Permanency in child welfare can have different meanings depending on the child, family, and case circumstances.

- Child welfare professionals first focus on supporting and stabilizing a family to prevent removal. Reunification is the preferred outcome for children removed from their homes and placed in foster care.
- When children must be removed from their families to ensure their safety, permanency planning efforts should focus on returning them home as soon as is safely possible or placing them with another legally permanent family.
- Other permanent families may include relatives, adoptive families who obtain legal custody, or guardians.
- Permanency also includes maintaining or establishing meaningful connections with other caring adults in the child's life (relational permanency) with family, friends, and connections to the community.<sup>i</sup>

### Why Is Permanency So Important?

- In order for a child to grow up as a healthy, functioning and productive member of society, a sense of a permanent home and family is key.
- Children benefit from stable, nurturing family lives, positive school environments and networks of caring friends, relatives and neighbors. This network of support can help a child perform well academically, have positive health and mental health outcomes and make it more likely that they will develop good relationship and social skills that can enable them to become successful adults.
- However, for children who enter the foster care system, these critical connections and sense of permanency may be lost from the moment a child is removed from home. This further places the children at risk of emotional and behavioral problems and other negative outcomes.<sup>ii</sup>

### How Will this Legislation Help?

- Each child age 7 or older in DCF's care will have the opportunity to express their preferred custody placement. This also allows for each parent to provide any name of an adult who can provide custody to their children.
- In child protection cases, judges should decide whether an agency acted properly when it removed a child from parental care, whether it provided parents with adequate supportive services during the reunification period and whether it took appropriate actions to ensure a child was placed in a permanent home. For several reasons, judges rarely make "no reasonable efforts findings". This legislation will require that the issue of whether reasonable efforts have been made be raised at a series of existing hearings including, both the ex parte removal hearing and the temporary orders hearing under section 24, the pre-trial conference, and permanency hearings under section 29B.
- Requires a regional clinical review team to conduct a review when any child or young adult has experienced more than 2 placements in a single foster care episode.
- A child who is 12 years or older could petition the court to reinstate parental rights if more than 2 years have passed since the entry of the order and if the permanency goal for the child is no longer adoption.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/overview/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.ncsl.org/documents/cyf/movingchildrenoutofcare.pdf>