

SENATOR LANDIS: Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature, as much as maintaining the purity of philosophical distinction would appeal to me as an argument, I have to place the interest of children first in this case and want to report to you that I have social workers who tell me that there are cases dating back nine months in Douglas County as to the disposition of children who are in need of foster care services or the determination of their parental rights, and for a child of tender years, nine months can well be one-fifth, one-sixth, one-eighth of their life. It is not a small amount of time to them. To you the equivalent would have to be four or five years to have your parentage, your living arrangements held in abeyance. That is not good enough. Now what we have done in the past is we have tried to run them some money here for a new juvenile judge and it has failed. But, apparently, the notion is that children in Douglas County have to wait for months on end to have their cases handled so that we can maintain a philosophically pure position. I am not prepared to wait, and if the best we can do to get to their needs is to have a county judge move across the hall and hear some cases and make some determinations, that is what should happen. I would suggest to you that the purity in its...the law in its majesty should not ignore the well-being of the people who come to the court for justice. And it is the children who are there for justice, and to have a nine month delay in these kinds of cases is unconscionable. It is not acceptable to say, wait a second, we have to have the right adjective on front of the name of a judge before we can have justice for children. That is what this amendment accomplishes and that is why we need to have the authority for county judges to handle these cases where the backlog is there, where children are having their futures uncertain because of slow caseload management. We need to do better and that is what this amendment does, and it lives within the budget constraints. There is no new money here and supporters of justice that I have heard on this floor that stand up and now carp about the hierarchy that should be maintained need to think back to what that system is supposed to do and who it is supposed to serve, and if it isn't children, I don't know who it should be then. I have lots of concern for them and not nearly as much concern about the ego or the letterheads of court systems. I would suggest we get our priorities straight and vote for this amendment.