

and by the time we find a suitable placement or actually allow for adoption, the damage has been permanent, in many cases, not only emotional but physical. I want to share one very briefly. It's about a child who was placed in foster care at the age of 10 weeks old. She had failure to thrive, had been severely neglected by a mentally ill mother who was 14-years-old. This mother is now, actually, I'm sorry, she was 14-years-old when she was first diagnosed with a mental illness. She did not live with the biological father, they were not married. The decision was made to place her in a foster adopt family. However, later Department of Social Services changed the plan to move toward reunification with the biological father even though she had not ever lived with the biological father and who himself was in trouble for DUI offenses, assault brought against him by a number of women who had been involved with him and still the plan was for reunification. Best interest of the child in my mind, even though this is not a significant change in policy, it clearly places the best interest before the reunification plan and particularly where safety and needs of the child in terms of developmental needs are given first consideration and to minimize the number of placement changes for children in out of home care based on the age and the needs of the child instead of reunification plans. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have. This is a very small first step but I believe it has had some impact already on a recent decision by the Supreme Court to overturn a court of appeals decision in a particular case dealing with a young child who had been placed since infancy. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

SENATOR CROSBY: Thank you, Senator McKenzie. For discussion on LB 739, Senator Wesely, followed by Senator Bernard-Stevens, Witek, Vrtiska and Schimek.

SENATOR WESELY: Oooh, how much time do we have?

SENATOR CROSBY: You have about eight and a half minutes, eight.

SENATOR WESELY: I'll be very brief. This is a very important bill so I hope it doesn't get lost in the shuffle here. But the pendulum that was swung in '87 back to trying to get into a situation with a family earlier to try to keep the family together rather than have them split apart because of dissension and then the children taken away, all of that was the right thing to do in '87. Unfortunately, trying to work with these