February 28, 2006

Re: Hearing on Adoption/Medical Subsidy

Dear Representative Hummel,

It is with great regret that we have to decline attending the senate hearings regarding Adoption/Medical Subsidy. It is still a very rough time in our lives and we are not strong enough to attend.

It has been 4 years since we lost our adopted son, who was 7 years old at the time. We were forced to relinquish our rights to our son so he could receive services for his mental health and we don't think he has gotten those services yet. His mental health illness is being ignored like it was when he was with us. If they acknowledge it, then they will have to pay for his treatment. He was homicidal and suicidal in our home and was a definite threat to us and our little girl, his little sister. He tried to take her life twice in our home. He has Reactive Attachment Disorder and Fetal Alcohol Effects.

For months when we were living in a crisis situation with our son, we could not get services for him because we did not have medical subsidy. Every service provider that we took him to had turned us down because we had no coverage, and no money to pay for therapy, counseling or mental health treatment. We were left with Community Mental Health in our county and they were absolutely no help to us in any way. We were threatened by staff at CMH and were treated like abusive parents.

We literally ran our son all over this state of Michigan trying to find services for him and felt let down every where we went.

On February 8, 2002, I remember crying on the phone with someone from the subsidy office in Lansing, begging for help because our son and my whole family were living in crisis with our son's mental illness. The worker I spoke with finally approved the medical subsidy for us. No one told us how to use it and then we were informed that this still didn't mean we would get services. Our Community Mental Health office in our county said they still had the last word if we got services or not and they turned us down for treatment for our son.

On February 14, 2002 after spending hours in an ER, our son was referred to Forest View in Grand Rapids by CMH, and we took him there in the middle of the night. Our son spent 7 days at Forest View, heavily medicated they sent us home with a more abusive and raging son. The doctor there would not do a follow up on our son's medicine and neither would our pediatrician, we were left with taking him to the ER at Mott's Children's Hospital, 6 hours and 300 miles from home. Two weeks later we were at the ER again, our son was raging and suicidal. On March 3, 2002 we drove him to Marquette General, where CMH had sent us, in the middle of a blizzard and in the middle of the night. We had just spent 5 hours in the ER getting no where with CMH. CMH first declined to come to the ER and meet with us, the ER doctor forced the CMH worker to come there and evaluate our son.

Our son never returned to our home after March 3, of 2002. He received no services what so ever in all the places we had taken him and we could not bring him back home and put us all in danger. We called the adoption agency where we adopted him and asked them to place him into temporary foster care as means of respite care. They

approved this and placed him in a foster home, then filed charges against us for child abandonment and neglect and placed our names on the central registry. We then had to prove we were fit parents to keep our daughter in our home.

Since then our names have been cleared and expunged, thanks to Senator Jason Allen for helping us getting our names cleared. We were lucky to have our names cleared, many other families here in Michigan are left with there names on there and they cannot volunteer at their child's school or even work at a school because of this. They are treated like common criminals.

After months of court hearings and trying to set up services for our son, we were forced to let him go back into the system, the very system that let him down all of his life.

We did receive medical subsidy but it was too late and we were never informed on how to use it and it left us with nothing. And this forced us to make a decision that no parent should have to make. We lost our son due to lack of mental health services here in Michigan because we had no medical subsidy. Many, many people let us down and were a huge factor in us losing our son.

We have no contact with our son his new adoptive parents will not speak with us and he is gone from our life forever.

We adopted our children from the Michigan Indian Child Welfare Agency, and we were lied to about his mental health, their fetal alcohol effects, her heart defect and his chronic asthma. All in the name of getting these children placed and then adopted. We would have still adopted our children, no question about that, but we would have had the tools to help him, if we were given the truth up front. We were left to find out on our own about our son's mental illness and the past trauma he had endured. If we would have known about his past trauma, he might not have traumatized his little sister in our home.

Because the adoption agency lied about our children, we could not apply for more adoption subsidy. We got the minimum and that is all we have ever gotten. We had to prove their level of care to the subsidy office and I have no idea on how to do that. The adoption agency knew about their level of care I have all of the medical records that were kept prior to adoption. The fetal alcohol effects, the chronic asthma, our daughter atrial septal defect, a heart murmur that we had to have closed at Mott's children's hospital 6 months after the adoption was finalized, and our son's mental health. Our children were definitely special needs prior to adoption, we just didn't have the proof until after the adoption was final, those medical records. How do you prove all of that after the adoption is finalized? If you receive medical subsidy, why doesn't the adoption subsidy go up?

Our daughter is doing well and it has been especially hard on her losing her brother this way. She is 8 years old now and has gone through over a year of therapy for grief and trauma she endured at the hand of her brother. She is also fetal alcohol affected and recently diagnosed with ADHD. We have needed tutoring for her but cannot afford it. And the evaluation that was given by Western University here in Michigan is still not paid. We still owe $400.00 for that evaluation. She is also approved for medical subsidy, but I still don't know how that works or if she will even be approved for this service that was provided.

She needs a level of care evaluation done on her case, she is in need of more services and we need more money to help our daughter.

Financially we are crippled. Losing our son and the 3 years leading up to that, we went completely broke we went bankrupt. We lost our vehicle and almost our home. Thanks to my parents, they helped us save our home. We have our own business and my husband is busy but we are still trying to catch up on our finances and I now work full time. We struggle week to week, and wish we could do more for our child. Parenting a special needs child is not cheap we struggle with getting our child what she needs and wish we had more help.

Emotionally we have been traumatized by the system and beaten up so badly that we no longer trust anyone. Our daughter is in a private catholic school because during our court hearing when we lost our son, the system involved the school system he attended and they falsely blamed us for our son's behavior and we cannot let our child go to public school. This is a small community and no one understood what went on with our son. So we are in debt with her tuition and don't know how or when we will catch up with this. We have our daughter in the best school and they tend to her special needs, but still needs much more tutoring than they can provide.

Again, we are so sorry we cannot attend this hearing. This is so important to foster and adoptive parents and families. We open up our hearts and our homes to love and care for our children. Not take the blame for all that has happened in their past or be treated like abusive and misunderstanding parents from our service providers that are supposed to help us.

I expected these professionals to work along side of me in parenting my children, not look at me as the problem. Things need to change in our state of Michigan before one more child has to be placed back out into the system that has already abused them. We need help with our special needs children.

We miss and love our son so much our family has been torn apart and has devastated us. Our daughter loves her brother and we all pray for him every night and pray that he is getting the services he needs to get well.

And, yes, families do relinquish their rights to children out of duress and lack of services for them, heartbreaking, but true.

Sincerely,

Janelle and Charles Smith
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