TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE REGARDING HB 4535 ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON CHILDREN'S JUSTICE

April 22, 2009

Good morning. My name is Lisa Sullivan. I am the Probate Judge for Clinton County, and I am here today on behalf of the Governor's Task Force on Children's Justice. I serve on the Executive Committee for the Task Force and serve as Chair of its Legislation Committee.

The Governor's Task Force is authorized under Title I of the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and was established in Michigan in 1991. The purpose of the Task Force is to review and recommend improvements to the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of Michigan child abuse and neglect cases.

Last year, the Task Force supported a bill, identical or nearly identical, to HB 4535. The Task Force is scheduled to vote on this bill at its next meeting. Although it has not yet voted on this Session's version of the bill, I do not anticipate a change in the Task Force's position.

This bill would prevent the decision of a parent, who voluntarily releases parental rights for the benefit of a child, from becoming a mandatory barrier to that parent raising other children in the future, except in severe circumstances.

I would like to thank Representative Byrnes for addressing issues which impact these types of cases, and for consulting with the professionals who work in this area when she was drafting the legislation. Thank you to the Committee for your time, and I know the Task Force looks forward to working with you on other issues.