



Testimony in Support of SB3853

*Submitted by Sarah Saran on behalf of Children's Home & Aid
February 8, 2022*

Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Saran, Associate Vice President of Statewide Intact Services at Children's Home & Aid. I want to thank Senator Morrison both for sponsoring this legislation and for holding today's hearing. Children's Home & Aid advances the well-being of children by investing in families to disrupt the systemic and multi-generational cycle of racial, social, and economic inequality. In addition to offering foster care and Intact services throughout the state, we are one of a handful of providers of the Extended Family Support Program (EFSP) administered by the Department of Children & Families (DCFS). We provide EFSP services in Cook, Madison, St. Clair, Bond, Clinton, Washington, Monroe, and Randolph Counties. In total, we can serve up to 50 caregivers and 90 children through the program. Today, we ask your support for SB3853, which creates a pilot program to expand the services offered to Extended Family Support Program families.

EFSP is a statewide program assisting caregivers who are supporting their relative's children without formal DCFS involvement. The program is designed to prevent entrance into foster care and support with the guardianship process. The program aligns with our and the Department's shared vision to provide more preventative services to children and families. Currently, however, EFSP providers can only offer limited support to these families. We can provide guidance and resources while they go through the process of formal guardianship over the children in their care, a one-time stipend of \$500, and obtaining eligible Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds. These families do not need monitoring or to be involved in the child welfare system, but they do need support during this transition into guardianship. Access to additional services will strengthen their family and ensure their success in keeping their relative's children out of foster care.

To determine the best approach to supporting caregivers through EFSP, we propose a pilot program for families to receive additional assistance. For caregivers taking in young children, home visiting provides tremendous benefits to both caregiver and child; these families should have easy access to these services. For caregivers taking in older children, parent mentors can be an invaluable guide in navigating skills they have not used before or in a while. And all of EFSP families need wraparound case support to ensure they are connected to needed community resources for the duration of their time in the program. The pilot and the implemented supports will be independently evaluated to inform future work in this area and any program expansion.

As part of our goal to move service delivery upstream, we believe building additional infrastructure and supports into programs like EFSP that prevent children from entering foster care is a step towards strengthening families and providing children the opportunity to thrive. We look forward to working together with the Department to ensure EFSP families receive access to these much-needed services and determine the best approach to supporting these families long-term.

Thank you for your time today and for the opportunity to speak on how we can support children and families in Illinois. I am happy to answer any questions you have about the program or the proposed legislation.