

Health and Human Services Committee
LB 334
January 25, 2017

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Division of Children and Family Services
Department of Health and Human Services

Good afternoon Senator Riepe and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Doug Weinberg (D-O-U-G W-E-I-N-B-E-R-G). I am the Director of the Division of Children and Family Services in the Department of Health and Human Services. I am here to testify in support of LB 334, which was offered by my division as a budget modification to the biennial budget. The Governor has included this modification and has accounted for it in his budget recommendation to the Legislature.

LB 334 proposes to eliminate the requirement for a pilot program in which the department contracts with two child placing agencies to use the Family Finding model to locate and connect children with family members or other important adults in their lives.

The Department will continue to make every effort to locate a child's non-custodial parent, siblings, parent of siblings and adult relatives, as required by federal and state law. Department staff across the state are actively locating and engaging family members without using the Family Finding model. It is a critical component of our efforts to find, engage, and when appropriate place children with relatives and kin. Largely, as a result of these efforts by Department staff, the number of children placed with relatives has increased 56 percent since the beginning of 2014 from 1,243 to 1,938 and with a 16 percent increase in the last 12 months alone. The percentage of children placed with relatives or kin has increased from 36 percent to 55 percent since the beginning of 2014.

The Department will be making Lexis/Nexis, a search engine, available to identified department staff to facilitate the process of finding family members. The Family Finding model is a relatively high cost, structured approach to locating extended family, kin, and other persons of significance to the child and engaging them in the life of the child. While this model has had relative success in locating relatives, achieving long-term engagement has been difficult. Many children referred to Family Finding continued to experience placement changes. Only 37 referrals, or 1% to 3% of total placements were generated between July 1, 2016 and December 31, 2016. I appreciate the work our family finding providers have done; however, the department has proven it can manage this program by doing a good job of locating family and achieving long-term engagement. This is an area we can embrace efficiency, as the department currently has an annual appropriation of \$883,800 for the pilot program.

I urge you to advance LB 334. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.