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The Honorable Nikki R. Haley,

I am a new resident to South Carolina. My husband and I were foster parents to multiple children in Iowa and adopted a child with prenatal meth exposure, high functioning autism, and ADHD. He is now ten years old, and given the high need for foster parents here in the Midlands, we have decided it would be a good time to make a difference in the life of more needy children.

We have just completed an application to become foster parents here. Through this process we have heard that the length of time that it can take before a child is legally free for adoption is unfairly lengthy and that family members of the child can, and often do, step up at any point in that process and request the child be placed with them. That thought is very saddening to us. Not only because of our feelings of loss that would or could occur if we had a baby or toddler placed with us for almost two years and then lost them to a family member, but more importantly because of the trauma that child has already gone through and will have to go through again.

I am uncertain of the laws as far as the involuntary termination time frame for a child here in South Carolina, but I believe that in Iowa parents had six months to do whatever it was that they needed to do in order to have their child returned to them. After that, rights are terminated, and no one can step in and try to remove the child from the already bonded relationship they are in with the foster/ adoptive family.

As you know, to be removed from a birth mother whether as an infant, or at any age, is difficult for the child. To create an emotional bond with a foster family as the new primary caregiver, develops the most rapidly in the first two years. To reduce the amount of times a child has to try to recreate that bond is crucial for their development and success all throughout their lives.

I am asking that you please consider looking into the statutory grounds and time frame for the process of permanency for South Carolina's littlest citizens. Their today changes everyone's tomorrow and I know you would want that to be a success; that is why I am bringing this matter to your attention.

Thank you for your time and keep up the great work!!

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "nicki Drake". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Nicki Drake