How Having a Foster Care Ombudsman Would Have Helped

Julius Kissinger’s Testimonial:
My siblings and I had no one. At times I didn’t know if I would make it through the night, or survive through the next day, or the next week. At the age of nine, I began to fear death and thought: “Could I actually die as a child?”

A few of my siblings tried to report the abuse that had gone on within our adoptive home. But no one would believe us. If my abusive parents found out, they would have punished us harshly. I never reported or tried to report any abuse myself, due to fear and because I didn’t know where to call.

In today’s society, a report of child abuse is made every ten seconds. Referrals to state child protective services involve 6.6 million children. And an estimated 3.2 million are subject to an investigated report (childhelp.org). Yes, these are statistics...but I do not see numbers. Instead, I see innocent children being abuse in some kind of way, and this is happening daily.

A way to curb some of the psychological, and physical damage, many children experience from child abuse everyday, is to implement a statewide Foster Care Ombudsman.

Having an Ombudsman, could have helped my siblings and I sooner, rather than later. There is physiological damage that cannot be reversed, and scars that can’t be erased.

In 2014, Nadine Burke Harris, spoke at a TED talk regarding how childhood trauma affects children. Exposure to adversity at a young age, affects the developing brains and bodies of children. For example, it affects the nucleus accumbens, the pleasure and reward center of the brain.

Nadine explains it inhibits the prefrontal cortex, which is necessary for impulse control, executive function, and learning. In addition, MRI scans show measurable differences in the amygdala, which is the brain's fear response center. Children exposed to high doses of trauma, are more likely to develop heart disease or cancer. Nadine explains, this has to do with the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, the brain’s and body’s stress system that governs our fight-or-flight response. In essence, if this part of the brain is engaged too much, it interferes with the growth and development of the brain, the immune system, hormonal development, and it can even affect the way a child’s DNA is written and transcribed.

Violet Ramunni’s Testimonial:
I was placed for adoption after being born premature, and spending the first two years of my life in the hospital. I was adopted into a family where I experienced multiple types of abuse. My adoptive parents adopted numerous medically fragile kids and homeschooled us, so our only outside contact was church activities. I tried reporting the abuse to others, but it was years before I was believed. At that time, I reentered foster care. If there had been a statewide Foster Care Ombudsman, the abuse could have been investigated, and I could have been removed sooner.