

Thank you for considering my submission to this crucial review.

As a dedicated carer for over 5 years, I have had the privilege of providing a stable and nurturing environment for numerous children, including those who have recently entered the foster care system. Currently, I am managing a long-term family placement that has spanned a decade, alongside the care of a child who has recently come into our home.

When children enter the foster care system, they often arrive with little to no belongings, requiring carers to swiftly gather essential items at short notice. This initial scramble can impose a significant financial burden on carers, as they strive to provide the necessities for the children in their care.

However, the true financial challenges arise once a child is placed in our care. Children within the foster care system often have complex needs that surpass those of their peers outside the system. These needs frequently extend to both physical and mental health, necessitating regular and sometimes frequent appointments. Additionally, being located in a regional area scheduled meetings with case workers and supervised visits with biological family members further contribute to the demands placed on carers' time and resources due to the large distances traveled to satisfy these needs.

Regrettably, the current allowances provided by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) barely cover the basic expenses of caring for these children, resulting in financial strain and disparities that are visible to the children themselves. For many carers, the costs associated with extracurricular activities, which are crucial for the holistic development and well-being of these children, remain unaffordable. This financial strain exacerbates the emotional turmoil experienced by children who are already grappling with the trauma of being placed in foster care and who are experiencing alienation from their peers as they are termed : "just another foster kid"

My wife and I both maintain full-time employment and shoulder the responsibilities of a mortgage and the upbringing of our biological children. Balancing these commitments alongside the demands of foster care, including attending appointments and providing emotional support, is a constant challenge. However, the need extends beyond logistical hurdles; these children require not only our time but also our unwavering love and support to help mend their bruised hearts.

Unfortunately, many carers, including those with the desire and dedication to continue providing care, are forced to leave the system due to financial constraints. In a society where dual incomes are increasingly necessary to meet financial obligations, prioritizing the payment of mortgages and basic living expenses becomes imperative.

An appreciable increase in the carer allowance would not only ensure that the needs of children in the foster care system are adequately met but also afford carers the financial flexibility to navigate their work commitments more effectively. This, in turn, would enable carers to allocate more time and attention to nurturing the emotional well-being of the children entrusted to their care, ensuring they receive the stability and support they desperately need.

I implore the review board to recognize the urgent need for substantive improvements to the carer allowance, thereby affirming the value of the invaluable contributions made by foster carers and prioritizing the well-being of the vulnerable children under their care.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards

Sebastian McDonagh

