

EXHIBIT 8
DATE 1/22/07
HB 57

**MONTANA CHILDREN'S INITIATIVE
PROVIDER ASSOCIATION - MCI**

TO: House Appropriations Committee
FROM: Jani McCall, MCI Executive Director
DATE: January 22, 2007
RE: HB 57 Foster Parent Liability & Property Damage Coverage

- I first want acknowledge the Interim Health and Human Services ^{Committee} for sponsoring this important proposal as a Committee Bill to the 2007 Legislature. The Committee took great interest in foster parents and the challenges they face. It was re-affirming and we hope that this Appropriations Committee will do the same. We hope that you get a sense of the weight of the responsibility and seriousness that these families take on by volunteering to care for and to raise Montana's needy and high risk children.
- The interest in drafting this legislative proposal came as a result of the research that had been with other states regarding licensing rules, particularly around liability. We found, to our surprise, that there are cost effective plans available in the country to provide liability and property damage coverage.
- National foster and family associations have position statements that support liability and property damage insurance to protect foster parents. These include the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, Foster Parent Professionals, and the Foster Family-Based Treatment Association.
- Montana is not breaking new ground. There are several states currently providing some form of liability coverage for foster families. If legislation is passed in Montana, the state's bidding and procurement procedures would be followed in selecting an appropriate plan.

- DPHHS has done research on various companies that provide this type of coverage and has compared some premium rates. I believe they are here today for informational testimony.
- We ask a great deal of our regular, specialized and therapeutic foster families. They care for some of the most difficult, vulnerable and high-risk children in our state. Foster care is an essential service and a significant part of our child welfare system. Any and every measure of support that we can provide to our foster families is deserved and needed.
- **"What would we do without foster families?"**
 - In June 2006, there were 2,129 children in foster care in Montana.
 - 35% of those children were Native American.
 - 54% of these children were 8 years old or younger.
 - Approximately 36% of foster care cases in Montana are meth-related.
- **Recruitment and retention of foster families is a major challenge and a priority for DPHHS.** Providing liability and property damage protection and coverage will speak volumes to our current foster families and to new families considering going into foster care. It lets them know that the Montana Legislature and the State appreciate what they do.
- Passing HB 57 to provide liability and property damage coverage and support for Montana's foster families is the **"right thing to do."**

Thank you for all of your attention and support regarding the issues and concerns we have brought to you regarding foster care. On behalf of MCI and in support of foster parents statewide, I urge you to vote in favor of HB 57.

If you have any questions I can be reached at 406-670-3084.

Thank you.

JM/jm

<u>952</u>	Total Licensed F. Families
195	Therapeutic Foster Care Families
106	Kinship Families
28	Specialized Foster Families
623	Regular Foster Families