EXHIBIT 4
DATE 2/9/09
HB 353

Dear Ladies & Gentlemen;

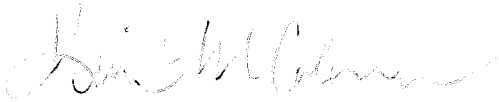
I am addressing you regarding the need for additional funds for foster families. As you may know there are as many stories and needs as there are children in the foster system here in Montana. When we received our two boys as foster children nearly 3 years ago; I quit my full-time job in order to stay home full-time w/ the boys. This seemed to be an "option" at the time but as it turned out, there truly was no other way we could have provided the care that the boys needed. We had to transport the boys to three therapy sessions a week each (physical, speech & occupational). Then there was transportation to and from all visits to the birth parents; all the evaluations of various types from eyes and ears to neurological and teeth and special evaluations at Shodair and then eventually meetings with a counselor. The boys' world was turned upside-down, very much for the better, but extreme change, non-the-less. I was not only the taxi, but the at-home therapist of each specialty, the mommy and counselor and the first person that our youngest child ever bonded with. Some of our daily "therapies" at home included teaching our 14 month old to clap his hands and then wave and so on. Our three year old would have panic attacks after birthparent visitation and would literally climb my body.

The change in our income was difficult to adjust to and so my husband took on giving private music lessons in addition to his two jobs. I then took on DJ'ing for weddings and parties on weekends after the boys were adjusted to being with my mother-in-law for a few hours without one of us; knowing they'd be picked up and sleep in their own beds.

We moved from McHugh mobile home park; which we thought would be a less-costly form of living, to Winne Avenue in order to save a minimum of 4 hours a week driving back and forth to appointments, allowing for a more regular schedule for naps and some more home time. On weeks that we had more than the usual weekly appointments, the time would be more. Before the move, I would often pack a lunch and we would eat at the hospital and take a movie machine and books or toys to have in the car sometimes if there was a waiting time between appointments. But, naps are important for growing children, along with fresh air and time to just play being a kid at home. Our oldest son, in particular struggles with an inability to regulate affect so structure is vital for him. He began to progress well at school but had a lot of struggles his second year in the special education pre-school due to the over-stimulating atmosphere; we found another pre-school that he could attend three days a week but it was of course, a private pre-school and quite costly but he excelled so much there that we felt we had to find a way to make it happen.

The truth of the matter is, that many children in the foster system need this level of care on a daily basis and they cannot be handed off to a daycare or left with a sitter on many occasions; and no one but their primary caregiver can take them to all of these appointments and learn to do and follow-through with all the specific care they need at home. We've made tremendous adjustments to our lives in order to accommodate the needs of our boys; who've we have just adopted on August 29th of 2008. We did not get funds for gas and my time was spent so often taking care of such specific needs that I was unable to even complete my on-line schooling in order to work from home; which means

there's not enough time to carry on a job from home yet either. To be honest, I don't know how other foster families survive. If it weren't for our family helping us with hand-me-down clothes and an inheritance that my husband received, we wouldn't have made it as well as we have. We've learned to budget every penny and say "no" a lot. We now have to adjust our grocery budget because we just must add more fresh fruit and some special foods to our youngest son's diet due to severe stomach problems and allergies that he is suffering. The stipend payments we received were nowhere near enough; we could have used twice that much. I've talked with families who would make wonderful foster parents but cannot do it because they cannot afford it. Do foster families have to shop at Goodwill, used second hand beds, toys and clothes just because the birth families cannot parent? What is truly the cause? Foster children are NOT second-class citizens and they need the best of care and the best that we can give them. I'm not asking for trips to Disneyland; but enough to buy them fresh food and not worry how we are going to make the payments and still be there for their needs. They should be able to have a private education if that better suits their needs. Families should not have to have 3 to 4 jobs in order to provide the basic needs of a Montana family.

My husband and I have been struggling with the decision to continue to take in more foster children because we're not sure about being able to afford any additional children and be able to meet all their needs. Please, support the bill to raise the stipend. Foster families need finances and should not have to fill out additional paperwork and explain every detail of what they do and where they spend every penny. They need to be afforded the dignity of parenting with the care and freedom that they need in order to meet the individual needs of the children that come into their homes. Children, who need, more than new clothes and toys or cd's and dvd's, but a parent who can be there to provide the stability and structure that they've been missing.

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