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Governor Ducey Signs Foster Care Safety Bill for Smallest Victims of the Opioid Crisis

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Phoenix—[SB 1473](#), a bill championed by Senator Nancy Barto (R – LD 15), passed the Arizona Legislature almost unanimously and was signed by Governor Ducey today.

[SB 1473](#) is legislation to address the epidemic rise of babies born exposed to drugs. When substance-exposed newborns can't safely return home from the hospital with family, they enter foster care. The legislation seeks to ensure that infants are on their way to a permanent home by their first birthday.

"This is consensus legislation because we all believe foster care should be temporary. We have children who have spent 16 years in the system and lived in 48 different homes," said Gen Justice Founder and President, Darcy Olsen. "Every child should have a safe, permanent, loving family."

SB 1473 is based on three principles: Foster care should be temporary; children should be safely reunified with parents or kin as soon as possible; and a child's need for care and stability are essential to their development. SB 1473 makes the following critical updates:

1. Requires a due diligence search for biological relatives as soon as a child enters state care to find kin as quickly as possible;
2. Recognizes that infants exposed to drugs, like heroin and meth, often suffer lifelong brain damage and adds non-medical in-utero drug exposure to the child welfare statutes;
3. Protects parents' rights, and when the parent or kin is unable to care for an infant, allows foster families who have cared for infants for 9 months or more to be considered a significant relationship like kin and provide a permanent home;
4. Requires DCS to bring severe abuse and neglect situations to the Court's attention immediately; a check and balance designed to prevent repeat abuse and fatalities; and
5. Emphasizes the importance of finding a permanent home for children under 3 within a year.

"I'm proud to sponsor SB 1473, legislation that will help substance exposed newborns find permanent homes. I've spent my career fighting for Arizona's vulnerable populations who don't have the voice to speak for themselves. Every child deserves a safe, loving family, and this bill brings us one step closer to that ideal."

Olsen hopes the legislation will put a stop to preventable tragedy. "Emma lived with us as a newborn. She's spent six years as a ward of the state - She was never reunified or adopted – and now suffers

from severe emotional, psychological and behavioral disorders.” Statistically, children like Emma have a greater chance of ending up in prison than of being adopted out of foster care.

1473 passed the Senate 30-0, the House 57-1, and was signed into law by Governor Doug Ducey.

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About Gen Justice

Gen Justice is pioneering legal rights and constitutional protections for children through public awareness, legislation, and free, focused litigation. Gen Justice was founded by Darcy Olsen, a veteran foster mother, with four under five at home. She is a nationally recognized reform leader and author of *The Right to Try*. Gen Justice has received Guidestar’s Platinum Seal of Transparency. Learn more at GenJustice.org and facebook.com/GenJustice.