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## TESTIMONY

**Bill: AB273 -- Allows the court to appoint a private guardian for certain classes of children who are currently in the custody of the Division of Child and Family Services or one of the counties.**

**NEVADA DIVISION OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES**

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Good morning Chairman Anderson and members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Edward Cotton, Administrator of the Division of Child and Family Services, here to offer testimony in support of Assembly Bill 273, which allows the court to appoint a guardian for certain classes of children.

There are many children in the custody of either DCFS, Washoe County, or Clark County who, for various reasons, cannot be adopted and cannot be returned to their parents.

Often these children have been in foster care or relative care for a long time, and are not in need of any specific services. An example may be a child who is placed with a relative due to being abused by his parents. After many efforts of trying to work with the parents to correct the behaviors that led to the child's removal, we may reach a point where they simply are no longer cooperating or it becomes clear they will never be able to provide a permanent home for the child. The child may be extremely bonded to the relative, and

1012 ASSEMBLY JUDICIARY

DATE: 3/25/03 ROOM: 3138 EXHIBIT D

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doing very well in school and developmentally. However, the relative may not be wishing to adopt the child (or the child may adamantly not want to be adopted) for family reasons. Currently we would have two options – try to move the child to an adoptive home anyway, or maintain the child in long term care. This Bill gives us an attractive third option – guardianship.

This Bill has many positives: a more stable custodial relationship for children; smaller caseloads for DCFS and the counties, since our custody would be dropped; ensures that the child will have a strong familial relationship when he “ages out” of the system. There are no negative points that would result from this legislation, although there are two fiscal issues. First, extensive staff training would be required to assure that staff are knowledgeable about this process and make appropriate use of the guardianship option. We estimate this cost to be about \$5800. The second cost is uncertain and could become significant. The Bill allows judges to order DCFS and/or the counties to file a report and recommendations in response to any motion to enforce, modify, or terminate the guardianship process. These kinds of reviews are relatively expensive. However, we have not yet worked with Clark and Washoe Counties to arrive at an estimated number of cases for which this could occur. Due to the integration of child welfare services that has occurred in Washoe, and the pending integration in Clark, this financial impact will be a greater concern to the counties in the coming years.

In summary, this is a Bill that is good for children and makes fiscal sense for the state and counties. I urge your support.

D L O J