



SULEMA JAHANGIR

Safeguarding will be paramount when easing fostering restrictions

The government has rightly recognised that care and compassion come in many forms, but must properly fund the agencies that protect children

Sulema Jahangir | Wednesday February 25 2026, 11.22pm, The Times

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The government's latest proposals to change fostering rules in England are intended to [create up to 10,000 additional placements](#) by 2029. Under the plans, councils would no longer be able to restrict applicants on the basis that they are single, unmarried, renting or working full-time.

Broadening eligibility is welcome, but the success of a foster placement depends on the person and not their "status". Children need nurturing, warmth and a home, not an institutional upbringing.

Where abuse occurs, the issue is not the label attached to a carer but whether safeguarding mechanisms function properly. Social services and the courts must be equipped to identify risk and intervene effectively. When those institutions are underfunded and not prioritised, children are left vulnerable. Until that changes, there will be no improvement. The foster parent's status is just a category on a form.



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Reform is particularly pressing at a time when residential care homes are facing an acute shortage of places and are often prohibitively expensive. National Audit Office statistics show that a single place in a residential children's care home costs about £318,000 a year, with most of the profits going to private firms.

The Department for Education has acknowledged that this costs local authorities significantly more than fostering, while children placed far from home can face disruption to their education and increased vulnerability.

Expanding the pool of foster carers also reflects the diversity of modern Britain. Many children grow up in rented accommodation, have single or LGBT parents, or parents with a disability. These factors in themselves do not affect their caregiving.

Yet local authority criteria can sometimes lag behind social reality, particularly in an era where home ownership is far less common and economic pressures are widespread.

Placement decisions must recognise that good caregiving comes in many forms. A child may have a better experience living with a single foster parent than with a family that simply mirrors their ethnicity, for example. Proximity to school, continuity of friendships, the child's age and individual needs often matter more than demographic symmetry.

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None of this suggests that safeguarding standards should be diluted. The welfare of a child should be paramount when deciding where to place them.

Relaxing unnecessary requirements for foster carers should not also mean relaxing safeguarding checks. Recent cases of child abuse have often involved natural parents, with warning signs missed by agencies responsible for safeguarding, including the police, social services and the justice system. Sadly, the [underfunding of these institutions](#) is likely to continue.

If the state is serious about reform, resources should be directed where they [will make the greatest difference](#): strengthening social services, ensuring proper oversight, and supporting foster carers through training and practical assistance.

Sulema Jahangir is a partner at Dawson Cornwell