

March 7, 2021

Re: HF 1151 African American Family Preservation Act

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and Committee Members:

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners is proud to offer our support to HF 1151 (Agbaje), a bill that makes significant efforts to keep African American children with their families. We know that racial disparities exist throughout the entire child protection process, particularly for African American families. Ramsey County is committed to working with community to address these disparities to create a more equitable child protection system that works for all families.

In Ramsey County we have recently focused on transforming our own systems and processes to help address these disparities and find ways to ensure that more children stay with their families, safely. Some of these changes include focusing on early intervention work and connections to children's mental health services, mapping with community and Public Health to create safety in family and kinship relationships, 24/7 staffing to co-respond with law enforcement and be immediately available in all situations, and safely diverting child protection cases to Youth Intervention and Parent Support Outreach Program utilizing our specialized caseload multi-disciplinary team units

The bill sets higher standards on child protection agencies to work closely with parents to find family members or other kin who can take children in before turning to non-family foster care. Keeping children with family is important. In addition, there are clear standards for child protection agency employees in this bill. Ramsey County agrees with the expectation that our staff do their work honorably and that if they do not there should be consequences. We also look forward to the opportunity to work with the African American Child Welfare Oversight Council created by this bill and the Department of Human Services to improve the overall child welfare system.

We strongly support the African American Family Preservation Act and urge committee members to support it as well. Please feel free to contact Melissa Finnegan (651-278-8374) with any questions regarding this request.

Thank you,



Commissioner Toni Carter
Ramsey County Board Chair