

Dear Chairperson Schultz, Vice Chairperson Bahner and Committee Members:

My name is Katie Erickson, and I am a child protection investigator for Hennepin County, a community trainer with the MN Child Welfare Training Academy, training county and child welfare workers throughout the state on human trafficking and Minnesota's child protection response to sex trafficking of youth, and a community faculty at the University of Minnesota in the School of Social Work.

I am writing today in support of HF 1943. I was honored to be a part of the DHS Child Trafficking and Exploitation Work Group over the past several years, along with other stakeholders and subject matter experts from around the state, to develop our state's response to child protection's involvement in noncaregiver offender investigations of child sex trafficking. Collectively we knew when the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act mandate went into effect in 2017 requiring a child protection investigation when there are allegations of sex trafficking of a youth by a noncaregiver (nonfamilial) offender, that there would be unintended consequences to the families and youth we serve, and our goal was to develop a response that would reduce the harm to those families and youth now involved in the system due to this change and allow for child protection to be more focused on safety and service provision.

The overarching goal of a child protection investigation is to ensure children are safe in their homes, with their caregivers. A youth who may be a victim of sex trafficking by a noncaregiver offender has unique experiences and needs that require a different approach from child protection as the process of a traditional child protection investigation does not allow for workers to best serve those youth. The development of a 'third track' to a child protection response for these cases, outside of a Family Assessment or Traditional Investigation, would provide the opportunity for child protection workers, law enforcement, community providers, and advocates to collaborate, safety plan, and serve youth in a way that supports their unique needs. Eliminating the requirement for child protection workers to interview the alleged non caregiver sex trafficking offenders (as is currently required in a traditional child protection investigation) would return the task solely to law enforcement and allow for the time needed for that criminal investigation, without child protection's interference, in that delicate process.

As a child protection investigator, and also as a trainer with the Training Academy, I have both experienced in my work and heard from workers around the state, the need for the system to address these investigations differently. Along with input from survivor youth, the Noncaregiver Sex Trafficking Assessment was created by those who want to ensure child protection can better serve this specific population. I ask and strongly encourage you to vote in favor of this legislation and would gladly welcome the change to my work as I see the benefits it would have for the youth and families I serve.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration of this bill.