



First Witness

CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

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Judicial Finance and Civil Law Committee

Chair Becker- Finn

559 State Office Building

100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther Kind Blvd.

St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Becker Finn and members of the committee,

Thank you for including First Witness HF774 in your omnibus bill. We are grateful and humbled by your support.

According to the CDC and other sources, 1 in 7 girls, 1 in 13 boys and 1 in 4 non-binary youth in the US will experience sexual abuse before the age of 18. First Witness Child Advocacy Center is a child-focused non-profit agency offering hope, healing, and justice for alleged victims of child abuse and their families.

As stated by Representative Kozlowski, First Witness has a bold vision that we can all get behind – a vision that supports children and puts an end to child abuse. Child abuse is one of our nation's greatest social problems, together with both prevention and appropriate response we continue to move towards this bold vision.

First Witness sees our role in disrupting the cycle of violence and building safety both on the individual and on the community level. Our team of professionally trained Forensic Interviewers protect child victims with safe, evidence-based techniques. Our family advocates build connections across systems to represent families' needs. Our prevention educators spend time in classrooms empowering children around safety strategies and freedom from self-blame. They train teachers, youth-serving professionals and parents on both prevention and appropriate response.

Since our beginnings First Witness has expanded our efforts both in numbers served and services offered. This increase has led us to desperately need a new and much larger building. Ten years ago we served 70 children annually, last year we served 220 children providing child-friendly legally defensible forensic interviews, intensive ongoing advocacy, mental health services, and medical exams.

This new building includes child and teen-centered spaces, space for on-going advocacy services, an additional forensic interview room, a medical exam room and a multidisciplinary team space that allows for law enforcement, social services and attorneys to truly respond to the needs of these difficult cases. Finally, a training center will bring investigators and advocates from around the state and country to learn from our national model.

The course of a child abuse investigation is challenging. Our justice system is one that is authoritative and is set up to have respect and reverence for the law, this doesn't work well for a child to talk about

We stand with kids.

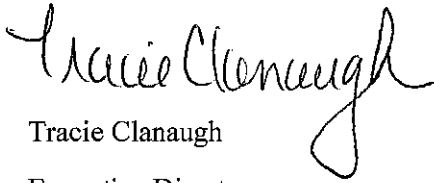
their trauma freely and openly. Our Child Advocacy Center is committed to a space that supports children and empowers them to share their experiences.

While First Witness works closely with the counties they serve, it is important they remain neutral in a court of law to provide legally defensible forensically sound interviews. This requires them to be in a privately owned building, independent from their investigative and prosecuting partners.

First Witness provides a critical role in providing training to our Multidisciplinary Teams in our region and in our state. Law Enforcement, Social Services, and County Attorneys rely on the expertise of First Witness to provide evidenced-based training that prepares them to investigate and prosecute cases of child abuse.

The course of a child abuse investigation is challenging to navigate. To address this, we offer a comprehensive and holistic Child Advocacy Center that provides effective prevention, intervention, and systems change.

Again, thank you for the inclusion of HF774 in your omnibus bill. Please call me, 218-384-1371 or e-mail me, tclanaugh@firstwitness.org, if you have any further questions.



Tracie Clanaugh

Executive Director

First Witness Child Advocacy Center