



# Adult Representation Services

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March 2, 2023

Chair Jamie Becker-Finn  
559 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Bill to Establish an Office of Appellate Counsel and Training (HF 922/ SF 1642)

Chair Becker-Finn and Members of the Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee:

I write on behalf of Hennepin County Adult Representation Services (ARS) in support of HF 922, which would establish an Office of Appellate Counsel and Training in Minnesota. I want to thank you for your consistent commitment to improving outcomes for children and families involved in child protection proceedings in Minnesota.

ARS is an independent county organization that provides legal representation to clients experiencing poverty in civil matters where they are entitled to an attorney. This includes representing parents and guardians involved in the child protection system in Hennepin County.

Beginning in January 2023, Minnesota statute mandates the appointment of counsel for parents at all stages of child protection proceedings, including through appeal. Under the law, parents have the right to appeal a final order in their child protection case, including an order terminating their parental rights.

The right to appeal is hollow if the quality resources are not in place to provide this service. The state's appellate courts provide important oversight. They also provide helpful guidance and clarification around the law. This guidance is invaluable for all juvenile court practitioners. Without a coordinated effort around appeals, many important issues go unresolved, resulting in disparate application of the law.

Centralized representation for appeals makes logistical sense. The work is not county-specific and can be performed remotely from anywhere in the state. Moreover, a centralized office will enhance the appellate practice by helping practitioners stay abreast of relevant caselaw, by having resources in place to meet quick filing deadlines and by providing needed mentorship to lawyers interested in this important work.

The other gap filled by this centralized office is coordinated training and support for all parent attorneys practicing in Minnesota. As a growing group of practitioners who provide this representation for parents and guardians, reasonable and collaborative resources are essential to

cultivating supply for the work and creating stability for this practice area. All stakeholders in the justice system would agree that well-trained attorneys provide efficiencies within the legal system and avoid unnecessary delays that impact children and families.

Finally, attorney wellbeing is essential to ensuring that clients are well-served. The Minnesota Supreme Court and Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers has made this issue a priority in our legal system. Child protection is a complex practice area with emotionally charged cases and outcomes. Cultivating a community coupled with access to ready resources will enhance the health of attorneys practicing in this important area.

We urge members of the committee to support HF 922 to help ensure parents and guardians who are experiencing poverty have access to well-trained, qualified attorneys at all stages of child protection proceedings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeanette Boerner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jeanette Boerner  
Director  
Hennepin County Adult Representation Services