

February 24, 2025

Re: Support for HF1276

Chair West and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our strong support HF1276. The Minnesota Social Service Association (MSSA) strongly supports the modification to Northstar Care for Children for foster children under the age of six who reach permanency with relatives or within the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA) placement preferences. MSSA is made up of over 5,000 health and human service (HHS) professionals statewide. Our members cover the health and human service spectrum—child welfare providers, mental health providers, social workers, case managers, etc.—and are employed by for-profit and nonprofit entities, as well as state and local government agencies.

When children six and older in the Northstar Care for Children program reach permanency they continue to receive the same financial benefits they received while in foster care. For children under the age of six this benefit decreases by 50%. This lack of financial support negatively impacts younger children and their families, especially low-income relatives that have important non-financial resources and the child's best interests at heart but may not have the financial resources to care for them long-term. Increased financial benefits are essential for Fosters to maintain stability with their relative care providers. Fosters with greater financial support are less likely to have permanency delayed, be moved to non-relative homes outside of their communities, or reengage with the child welfare system.

In 2023, approximately 45% of the 490 children waiting for adoption were siblings who needed to be adopted together (DHS-4746-ENG 11-24: *Adoption: Finding families for Minnesota's waiting children*). Sibling connections are often most people's longest relationship in life and provide a protective factor for Fosters. Equalizing Northstar Care for Children benefits for children who reach permanency with relatives will ensure relatives are financially supported in caring for sibling groups and keeping them together.

This modification to Northstar Care for Children ensures that Fosters have the opportunity to grow up in supportive, stable homes and maintain connections to their families and communities. Thank you for supporting this legislation and your continuing efforts to improve the experiences of Fosters.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to share our support for HF1276 on behalf of our members and the clients they serve. Please reach out to us with questions, comments, or concerns at msancartier@mnssa.org.

Sincerely,

Michelle SanCartier
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