



March 23, 2022

To: House Human Services Finance & Policy Committee

Re: HF4217 Foster & Adoptive Family Recruitment

Dear Chair Schultz and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to express Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota's (LSS) support of House File 4217 which will increase recruitment and support for kinship caregivers as well as increase the pool of foster and adoptive families to better reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children in need of placement. LSS is a provider of essential services across all 87 counties with more than 2,500 employees serving 1 in 65 Minnesotans every year. This includes LSS' Kinship Family Support Services which offers vital resources and support to kinship caregivers – those caring for a relative's or friend's child. Annually, LSS supports over 300 families through individualized case management services and connects with over 1,200 individuals.

LSS has received an increased number of requests from kinship caregivers who seek education and support. We see firsthand that foster parents and kinship caregivers play a vital role in caring for children who are unable to remain at home. Supporting our foster parents to provide excellent care *includes* recruitment of foster parents who are reflective of the communities and culture of the children receiving care. When children have experienced any form of trauma or crisis, their risk factors decrease when cared for by loving and supportive family members. We must work to find ways to locate and provide individualized, culturally responsive outreach to kinship caregivers so that children remain connected to their families, communities and traditions.

Kinship caregiving spans cultural, racial and socioeconomic lines. It is time to properly invest in kinship caregiver services and supports in a way that truly recognizes the positive role kinship families play in fostering safe and healthy development of children, preserving cultural traditions and values, and increasing the protective factors they offer by caring for children experiencing trauma.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity. LSS is committed to the important work of building a foster care system that supports children and families. If we can be of service or support on these issues, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or our Advocacy Manager, Jeru Gobeze at jeru.gobeze@lssmn.org.

Sincerely,

Patrice O'Leary
Associate Vice President of Family Services
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota