

April 15, 2024

Chair Dave Pinto
House Children and Families (CF) Committee
503 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Melissa H. Wiklund
Senate Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee
2107 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Inclusion of Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act (HF912/Agbaje and SF716/Champion) Omnibus Supplementary Budget Bill

Chair Pinto and Chair Wiklund,

The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage writes to urge you to include the African American Family Preservation Act (AAFPA) in the omnibus bills of your respective committees. Child welfare disparities harm Black children and families. **Our Council advises that the Minnesota Legislature address child welfare disproportionality very directly as a matter of civil rights and good government.**

Black children are overrepresented at every stage of child protection services (CPS). Black children are multiple times more likely to be reported to CPS, contacted by CPS, and removed from their families by CPS. This overrepresentation means that Black children and families are disproportionately burdened by the impacts of police surveillance and punitive actions in the child welfare system. Our communities are also impacted by the short-term and long-term harms of child removal and family separation. The data shows that out-of-home placement increases a child's vulnerability to numerous developmental and societal problems¹.

It is impossible to overstate the level of hardship and trauma our communities are experiencing around the issue of child welfare disparities. Our Council has consulted with African Heritage community leaders, including Black legislators and other elected officials, about community concerns and the pathways for meaningful steps forward. We offer the following recommendations:

- 1) **Address the real challenges that Black children and families face within the child welfare system.** Child welfare disproportionality is a matter of civil rights and a problem of bad science

¹ On Black overrepresentation in child protection, see data compiled in NAACP Minneapolis's recent [formal complaint](#). Also see this [MN DHS report](#) on 2022 data. For more about the harmful impacts of child welfare disproportionality, see MIT's major studies on the harm of removal: [Child Protection & Child Outcomes](#) (2007); [Child Protection & Adult Crime](#) (2008); [Causal Effects of Foster Care](#) (2013). Also see the [ABA's resource](#) summarizing extensive research in this field. For discussion of the role of poverty in child removal and the importance of prevention in child welfare, see this [systematic review](#) of 4+ decades of research as well as this [synthesis of studies](#) by researchers at Boston University.

and poor practice. The Legislature must make laws that arrest bad public practices. Our communities need public finance and policy resources that can scale up good practice and science in the child welfare system.

- 2) **Prioritize, pass, and sign the African American Family Preservation Act into state law.** The AAFPA is based on good science, and its emphasis on prevention aligns with best practices for protecting children and families². Its provisions would benefit African American, African Immigrant, and other children and families impacted by child welfare disproportionality. The AAFPA received four successful legislative hearings this year. Our Council thanks you and your committees for listening to impacted families and passing the bill in March 2024. Please continue to listen to community by including the AAFPA in your omnibus bill packages.

Our deepest gratitude to Representative Agbaje and Senator Champion for their leadership on this bill. We also commend you and your committees for your leadership in the bill's movement through the legislative process this year. We urge you to act now on the above recommendations.

Sincerely,

Linda Sloan | Executive Director | Linda.Sloan1@state.mn.us

Theodore Rose | Policy Director | Theo.Rose@state.mn.us

Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage

The Minnesota Legislature empowered the Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage to ensure that people of African heritage fully and effectively participate in and equitably benefit from the political, social, and economic resources, policies, and procedures of the State of Minnesota. Generally, the Council is charged with the responsibility of:

- *Advising the Governor and the Legislature on issues confronting People of African Heritage;*
- *Advising the Governor and the Legislature on statutes, rules, and revisions to programs to ensure that Black people have access to benefits and services provided to people in Minnesota;*
- *Serving as a liaison to the federal government, local government units and private organizations on matters relating to People of African Heritage in Minnesota;*
- *Implementing programs designed to solve problems of People of African Heritage when authorized by statute, rule, or order; and*
- *Publicizing the accomplishments of People of African Heritage and their contributions to the state.*

² The provisions in the AAFPA are based on empirical science and model practices about the benefits of family preservation, heritage and kin networks, and quality social and economic services for child well-being and long-term development. See [Conrad-Hiebner and Bryam 2020](#), [NCCPR October 2022](#), [Epstein 2017](#). In addition to the research literature, Hennepin County and Village Arms report that a pilot project based on AAFPA provisions was successful at improving child well-being in Minnesota by reducing unnecessary child removal.



April 15, 2024

Minnesota House Children and Families Committee
503 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Pinto and Members of the House Children and Families Committee:

The Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP) appreciates the opportunity to provide written public testimony regarding a few provisions in omnibus bill HF2476. LSAP is the advocacy arm of Legal Aid and has provided legislative and administrative advocacy on behalf of Minnesotans with low incomes since 1977.

While the funding this session is more challenging, Legal Aid is disappointed that the following one-time emergency \$250,000 provision could not be included:

SNAP as Medicine. This \$250,000 one-time appropriation (the amended and scaled version of HF3469) would provide critical outreach to 6,000 Minnesota adults who lost SNAP benefits under federal time limits and would also require DHS to make legislative recommendations for a more sustainable SNAP as Medicine program. Many of these adults are struggling with chronic illness, undiagnosed disabilities or addiction. Some are precariously housed or unsheltered. Legal Aid believes many are eligible for federal SNAP benefits but need assistance with navigating federal exemptions.

Legal Aid is grateful for the inclusion of the following provisions:

- 1) **Summer EBT.** Legal Aid appreciates that Minnesota will join several other states to provide the infrastructure necessary for children to access summer meals with federal funding.
- 2) **College SNAP.** Legal Aid strongly supports the clarification to state law that will allow students who are attending public colleges, universities, or Tribal colleges – and who are eligible to receive the Pell Grant – to qualify for SNAP benefits.
- 3) **Emergency Food.** With the continued rise in food prices and food shelf visits statewide, and the loss of SNAP benefits to 6,000 Minnesota adults without dependents under federal time limits, Legal Aid appreciates the investment in emergency food.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jessica Webster, Staff Attorney
Legal Aid



April 16, 2024

The Honorable Dave Pinto, Chair
House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
503 State Office Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Brian Daniels, Ranking Member
House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
231 State Office Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Pinto, Republican Lead Daniels, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Students United, Hunger Solutions, Second Harvest Heartland, and the Partners to End Hunger coalition, we write today to support HF4517 included in the House Children and Families Finance budget bill.

What does HF4517 address?

Too many students across our state live with the daily burden of food insecurity and, as a result, suffer worse academic outcomes and struggle to complete their degrees. This crisis impacts over a quarter of students in Minnesota, and it's time to act.

Currently, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the federal program that provides food-purchasing assistance for Americans with low incomes, is a primary mechanism for addressing food insecurity. Unfortunately, it is exceedingly difficult for college students to access the benefits of SNAP.

In addition to meeting the usual SNAP eligibility requirements, college students must meet a specific student exemption.



How did we get here?

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, passed by Congress in 2021, introduced two temporary exemptions to expand postsecondary student access to SNAP during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Specifically, students with work-study and an expected family contribution of zero dollars on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) became eligible for SNAP assistance. However, with the expiration of the public health emergency, the burdensome “work for food” requirements returned.

These requirements were especially devastating because we know that the temporary exemptions afforded students who desperately needed access to SNAP. In fact, according to a [report](#) from Minnesota’s Department of Human Services, SNAP served 37% more postsecondary students in November 2022 compared to December 2019. Moreover, food insecurity decreased among survey respondents from 73% to 32%.

How would HF4517 work?

Minnesota lawmakers can follow the example of states like Ohio, Arizona, and Oregon in addressing this issue at the state level. Specifically, HF4517 would clarify state law and allow students who are attending public colleges, universities, or Tribal colleges and who are eligible to receive the Pell Grant and otherwise SNAP eligible to qualify for SNAP benefits.

In every corner of our state, students struggle to afford basic necessities and fight the ache of hunger. Lawmakers can help these students by leveraging federal dollars and passing HF4517 at no cost to the state. We urge members to support Representative Keeler’s efforts.





Institute to
**Transform
Child Protection**

Mitchell Hamline School of Law
875 Summit Avenue, Room 254
Saint Paul, MN 55105-3076

phone 651.290.8653
fax 651.290.6407

April 15, 2024

Chair Dave Pinto and Committee Members
Minnesota House of Representatives
Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

Re: Letter of Support for HF2476

On behalf of the Mitchell Hamline School of Law Institute to Transform Child Protection, we write in support of HF2476. We write to share our appreciation of inclusion of core components of HF4192, a state fiscal analysis of Minnesota's child welfare system, into the Committee's Omnibus bill.

The purpose of the bill is to perform a transparent and independent external analysis of the complex streams of funding available to Minnesota's child welfare system to better understand and develop opportunities to repurpose and reinvest additional federal and state funds into preventative services for counties, tribes, and families that need them. This is critical work to improve outcomes for children in Minnesota – and we appreciate the Committee's support of this initiative.

Sincerely,

/s Joanna Woolman

Joanna Woolman
Professor of Law

On behalf of Institute to Transform Child Protection
Mitchell Hamline School of Law



Institute to
**Transform
Child Protection**

Mitchell Hamline School of Law
875 Summit Avenue, Room 254
Saint Paul, MN 55105-3076

phone 651.290.8653
fax 651.290.6407

April 15, 2024

Chair Dave Pinto and Committee Members
Minnesota House of Representatives
Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

Re: Letter of Support for HF2476

On behalf of the Mitchell Hamline School of Law Institute to Transform Child Protection, we write in support of HF2476. We write to share our appreciation of inclusion of core components of HF4192, a state fiscal analysis of Minnesota's child welfare system, into the Committee's Omnibus bill.

The purpose of the bill is to perform a transparent and independent external analysis of the complex streams of funding available to Minnesota's child welfare system to better understand and develop opportunities to repurpose and reinvest additional federal and state funds into preventative services for counties, tribes, and families that need them. This is critical work to improve outcomes for children in Minnesota – and we appreciate the Committee's support of this initiative.

Sincerely,

/s Joanna Woolman

Joanna Woolman
Professor of Law

On behalf of Institute to Transform Child Protection
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

April 15, 2024

Support of Emergency Services Program Funding in HF2476
Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

Dear Representative Pinto and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless (MCH) and the countless individuals and families we serve, I extend our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support of the Emergency Services Program (ESP). Your recent decision to allocate \$4 million towards this vital initiative is a beacon of hope for those experiencing the harsh realities of homelessness in our state.

As an organization representing over 70 members across Minnesota, MCH understands the critical importance of emergency shelter in providing immediate relief to individuals facing homelessness. Your commitment to bolstering ESP funding underscores your dedication to ensuring that no one in our community is left to endure the elements without a safe haven.

The absence of accessible emergency shelter options forces many individuals and families to seek refuge in unimaginable conditions – sleeping outdoors, in makeshift tents, or even within the confines of their cars. ESP serves as a lifeline for these vulnerable populations, offering not only a roof over their heads but also access to essential resources and support services.

Your advocacy for investing \$4 million into ESP will undoubtedly facilitate a smoother transition for those experiencing homelessness towards a more permanent and stable living situation. By empowering organizations and local communities with the necessary resources, we can forge stronger pathways to housing security for all.

Shelter saves lives, and housing ultimately ends homelessness. Your steadfast support of ESP reaffirms our shared belief in the transformative power of compassionate action. We are immensely grateful for your leadership and advocacy on behalf of those in need.

As we continue to navigate these challenging times, we stand united in our mission to create a more inclusive and equitable society. Thank you, Representative Pinto, for your invaluable partnership in this endeavor.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Sincerely,

Laquita Love-Limo
Policy Fellow, Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless

Matt Traynor
Interim Executive Director, Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless