



An association of resources and advocacy for children, youth and families
www.aspiremn.org

March 4, 2024

Dear Chair Pinto and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

Kinship caregivers are driving core prevention and child welfare supports for children and families across the state of Minnesota. AspireMN strongly supports investments as outlined in HF1661 to support:

- Prevention of engagement with the child welfare system by providing support to relative kin who are caring for children informally, and
- Active support for kinship caregivers who are serving children as foster caregivers in the formal child welfare system

Both of these strategies support children and families to maintain stability and wellbeing as children grow up within their family and community culture – significant assets for positive development.

As a statewide association of children's service providers AspireMN sees the great need for a robust continuum to meet the needs of children and families. When families receive the support they need, children and communities do better.

We appreciate the thoughtful support of this committee for healthy child and youth development and investment in family stability. Thank you for your consideration of priority investments in kinship caregivers by supporting HF1661.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Anderson
Executive Director

AspireMN improves the lives of children, youth and families served by member organizations through support for quality service delivery, leadership development and policy advocacy.

1919 University Avenue W. #450, St. Paul, Minnesota 55104



March 3, 2024

Chair Dave Pinto
503 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Kinship Caregiver Support Grant Program (H.F. 1661)

Chair Pinto and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of the Mitchell Hamline School of Law Institute to Transform Child Protection (ITCP), we write in support of H.F. 1661. We support the request for funding of grants to support the essential role of formal and informal kinship caregivers. The Preventing Foster Care Placement Kinship Grant Program will be made available for eligible community-based nonprofit organizations to assist with connecting caregivers with resources to help alleviate the need for child welfare involvement. To be eligible for a grant, the community-based organization must have a demonstrated history of providing this support and be able to serve racially and geographically diverse populations. The support may include assessments of caregiver and child needs, connections to resources, and assistance with case management. Relatives are often underutilized and unsupported in the child welfare system, despite the positive benefits for children that occur with relative and kin involvement. Connecting kinship caregivers with resources will directly benefit children, families, and their broader communities by preserving family ties and reducing the need for new or continued system involvement.

The Institute to Transform Child Protection recognizes the critical need for proper kinship support. A strong relationship with kin is almost always in the child's best interest. Research shows there are numerous benefits of placing a child with kin, such as increased permanency, fewer placements disruptions, improved behavioral health, increased likelihood of siblings being placed together, and remaining connected to the child's community. A primary goal in child welfare cases is reunification and maintaining important relationships with the child's family. Kinship placements have far higher rates of reunification for children and families than non-kinship placements. These placements must be encouraged whenever possible through sufficient support for kinship caregivers during each step of the caregiving process. This bill is a vital step in protecting children and families involved in or at risk of being involved in the Minnesota child welfare system.

Sincerely,

Institute to Transform Child Protection
Mitchell Hamline School of Law Child Protection Clinic

Chair Pinto and members of the children and families finance and policy committee,

One thing I can say about EVOLVE Family Services, a nonprofit licensing agency, is that everyone I worked with is very nice and understandable. They also care for me, the kids and the family they had before being placed. They helped me with my licensing process and they make sure it was not hard for me or stressful. They also asked about my mental health and how I'm feeling and also all the kids even my other kids, they did not make us feel left out. They also help me understand that foster kids do experience trauma and are often mistreated. They taught me how to work with kids with trauma. They also not just a agency, they are family. This is why I love working with them even my licensing worker, Lisette. They also help me get my foster care license and I got it before a year... thanks for the love and caring for me and my little family and for supporting kinship providers. This is why I support HF1661.

-Bernice (Muffy) Malone, Kinship Foster Care Provider

Madam Chair and Members of Committee. My name is Kynia Love and I am the paternal grandparent and a licensed relative caregiver for my grandson who is 3 years old. I am here to support HF1661.

My story begins when my grandson was removed from his home nearly three years ago and placed in foster care. He was placed in six different foster homes prior to being placed with me, some of which were relative placements and others that were non-relative. My grandson's sixth placement was with his intended permanency outcome, a non-relative caregiver. I have endlessly advocated for placement of my grandson over the past three years and was not seriously considered or even responded to until July 2023. After many attempts to get in contact with the placing agency, my family and I finally reached our local ombudsman who was able to assist us in connecting with the placing worker. I finally began the licensing process through the county for my grandson this fall and was officially licensed in October, 2023. There were many aspects of my life that I needed to sacrifice and adjust to get placement of my grandson which included moving to a larger home, reducing my work hours to accommodate the licensing meetings and appointments for my grandson, and spending nearly all of my savings to take time off of work when my grandson was placed in my care. In January 2024, my license transitioned to a community-based provider, EVOLVE Family Services and I finally got placement of my grandson. Having my grandson in my care has been an exceptionally healing experience for both of us.

My experience working with a community-based provider has been incredibly impactful on my experience in providing care for my grandson. I have felt for the first time that I wasn't being seen as a criminal and was being seen as the preferred placement option and grandparent. I finally feel validated by being part of a community of other relative and kinship caregivers who have experienced similar experiences and who can be a support to me long term as I adopt my grandson. The level of support that I've received in such a short period of time including hands-on support in transitioning my license, financial resources, and general validation of my experience has been exceptional.

This has been my journey – it's important for kids to know their family origins and our family recognizes how important this is for our grandson's identity development as a young Black boy. My grandson will now know his roots and his family history. I am here to support HF 1661 to advocate on behalf of other kinship families, and the financial resources necessary to provide support for kin families while they navigate this challenging process.