

THE WALZ-FLANAGAN BUDGET



TO MOVE MINNESOTA FORWARD

Investing in What Works: Family Support and Connection

Preserving relationships with family members while an individual is incarcerated leads to stronger community ties, promotes rehabilitation, and reduces recidivism. Studies repeatedly find a significant link between family contact and success when returning to community.

In 2021, the Minnesota Legislature passed the first-in-the-country Healthy Start Act, providing incarcerated mothers the opportunity to create strong bonds with their newborn babies and increasing positive outcomes for both mom and baby. The work to support meaningful connections between incarcerated individuals and their families continues with the investments requested below.

These budget requests are targeted at increasing opportunities for incarcerated individuals to meaningfully engage with their family members through more routine contact with loved ones, increased parenting programming for incarcerated moms and dads, and expanded capacity for families and their communities to create positive connections with incarcerated individuals.

Create a Family Support Unit



The requested investment of \$280,000 in FY 2023 and each year ongoing will create a family support unit within the Department of Corrections that focuses on supporting meaningful connections between incarcerated individuals and their families. The investment will provide the DOC with needed staffing capacity to explore and partner on evidence-based programming with community members and organizations such as parenting programs. The unit will lead the agency on developing strategies and policies to support incarcerated individuals and their families.

Invest in Connecting Families



The requested investment of \$1.5 million in FY2023 will provide more frequent communications and related supportive services for incarcerated individuals to connect with family members and other approved support persons or service providers through in-person visits, video visits, and phone calls. Those who are incarcerated face challenges in keeping in touch with their families. Notably, family members of those incarcerated often pay the high cost of phone and video calls to support their incarcerated loved ones.



True criminal justice reform re family support

BY TIMOTHY HEAD, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 01/27/21 12:30 PM EST
THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL

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I've known for a long time that something isn't working in America's criminal justice system. Despite being a nation founded on the ideals of freedom, liberty and independence, America has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with approximately 698 out of every 100,000 people in prison at any given time.

We need criminal justice reform to keep people out of prison, make prison sentences more tolerable and constructive and help prepare former prisoners for a return to normal life. Strengthening family ties and increasing family contact are what will make that reform possible.

Families are a source of strength, personal direction and hope; they're the essential building block of a free society and a moral culture. It's hard to think of a single factor that has a larger impact on the future and direction of a person's life than family. And in times of hardship or pain, family can bring care, relief and comfort.

But prisoners risk losing touch with their families while in prison. Prisons are often hard to access by public transport, making the trip to visit an incarcerated loved one both financially and logistically challenging. And many families struggle with the emotional difficulties of seeing a loved one in prison. On top of that, visiting hours are brief and phone calls with family members are often prohibitively expensive for inmates.

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VIRAL ON FEED

That breakdown of family connection can have devastating consequences for incarcerated Americans. Losing touch with one’s loved ones and maybe even one’s spouse and children can exact an emotional toll that makes serving a prison sentence almost unbearable. But then there’s the impact of poor family contact and communication on recidivism rates.

Recidivism refers to a formerly incarcerated person’s return to crime. Recidivism rates vary across age and criminal offense, but no matter how you look at it, a shockingly high number of well-meaning American citizens returning to normal life fall back into patterns of criminality shortly after leaving prison. One [study](#) conducted by the Department of Justice found that about 44 percent of former prisoners are arrested again within just one year’s time. And that number jumps to about 68 percent within three years and 79 percent within six.

That data should be shocking. But for decades, [studies](#) have shown that prisoners who keep in touch with their families while in prison do better upon release and are less likely to return to crime. Anything we can do to build strong family connections for our fellow citizens in prison will go a long way toward reducing the rates both of crime and incarceration in America, while poor family contact will only make things worse.

Even simple, straightforward solutions can have an enormous impact. [Flikshop](#) is an excellent example of this. Flikshop converts Instagram messages into postcards and delivers them to inmates in prison, leveraging the ease and convenience of social media to deliver a form of regular, personalized contact from families and friends. Flikshop’s creator, Markus Bullock, was inspired by his [own experience in prison](#), when frequent letters from his mother helped him to survive prison and ultimately flourish as an entrepreneur. That’s why Bullock made it his mission to tear down barriers to regular family contact and ensure more people at our nation’s prisons can benefit from such communication from the outside.

The technology utilized by Flikshop isn’t complex but the idea behind it is genius. Upon reentering society, prisoners face a [host of legal barriers and social stigmas](#) that can prevent them from finding employment. They will need and rely on their families more than ever before. But if family relations atrophy through a lack of communication and contact, prisoners won’t have the robust family support to fall back on when they get released. And that lack of support can easily lead former prisoners back to crime.

What’s more, contact from loved ones and family members can inspire prisoners to live differently while in prison. Prisoners who feel encouraged and uplifted by their families might be more likely to stay out of trouble while behind bars and may have a stronger motivation to improve themselves in preparation for their life after prison. They may even feel driven to participate in the work training and entrepreneurship programs that prisons can offer.

Biden calls Putin a war criminal
Mark Kelly says White House should characterize Putin as a war...

That, too, will help fix America’s problem with over-incarceration. Prison entrepreneurship programs remain one of the most effective means to reduce recidivism rates and improve the outcomes of prisoners;



The Truth About Zellweger and Chesney's Brief Marriage is Totally Insane

MATERNITY WEEK

graduates of the Prison Entrepreneurship Program, for example, have a recidivism rate of just eight percent. And even though unemployment rates for formerly incarcerated persons are higher than the national average, 100 percent of PEP graduates find employment after being released. A simple thing like a postcard from a mother or father can lead a prisoner to join a program like this and start down a happier, safer and more productive path.

Our criminal justice system needs fixing and families will have to be a part of the solution. We need to devise the programs, policies and technologies that will keep the families of incarcerated persons together. The health and well being of our society and the justice of our prison system hang in the balance.

Timothy Head is executive director of Faith and Freedom Coalition.

TAGS CRIMINAL JUSTICE INCARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES CRIMINOLOGY PRISON RECIDIVISM RELATIONSHIPS FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS DECARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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TWEET



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children's defense fund minnesota

Dear Members of the Legislature:

We write to you today with strong support for HF 4191, a bill that would help ensure children of incarcerated parents have the best chance possible to thrive.

A significant percentage of Minnesota children are impacted by the Adverse Life Experience of having a parent in jail or prison at some point in their life. Sixteen percent of 8th, 9th, and 11th graders reported on the 2019 Minnesota student survey that they have now or have ever had a parent or caregiver in jail or prison. Almost half (48.3%) lived with the parent or caregiver when they went to prison or jail.

Maintaining relationships with parents is extra challenging for these children but also an extra important protective factor. Students with incarcerated parents are:

- Less likely to say parents care about them
- Less likely to be able to talk to parents about problems
- Half as likely to have any adult to talk to about problems

The creation of a Family Support Unit in the Department of Corrections as well as additional support for communication such as phone calls and video visits between incarcerated parents and their children could help reduce these negative outcomes for children. Investments in parenting classes and other forms of support would also make an important difference for both incarcerated parents and their children during an incredibly challenging time in life.

At Children's Defense Fund Minnesota our mission is to ensure every child has a healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start and a moral start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities, with special attention to those children facing the steepest barriers. Join us in supporting HF 4191 and the children of incarcerated parents that stand to benefit. They deserve this modest investment in their family relationships. They deserve to thrive.

Debra Fitzpatrick
Policy and Research Director



One goal. One passion. Shine.

March 14, 2022

RE: Support for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Dear Legislators:

As the child of a formerly incarcerated parent, not only am I pleased, but also passionate about urging you to support the Governor's policy and supplemental budget proposals supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents in Minnesota.

When I was six years old, my dad was arrested and incarcerated at Stillwater State Prison. The experience had an indelible impact on my life—to the point where I did not speak openly about the experience until I was in my forties. The child's experience is characterized by shame, others' judgment, and fear of revealed family secrets. I often say that incarceration is an unacceptable reason to be separated from your parent. Individuals, systems, and communities support kids who are separated from a parent due to death, divorce, or deployment. The same cannot be said about incarceration.

I'm disappointed to report that my experience of nearly 50 years ago remains unchanged or worse for today's children. Having an incarcerated parent was the most reported Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) by Minnesota students in 2016 (and 2nd most reported in 2019). Yet, the needs of families impacted by incarceration go largely unrecognized. Honestly, the current proposal is just the tip of the iceberg and a long over-due initial step in addressing enormous opportunities to assure EVERY child has a foundation on which to build his/her success. The building of that foundation starts with the following developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership

Children of Incarcerated Parents have the right:

1. To be kept safe and informed at the time of their parent's arrest
2. To be heard when decisions are made about them
3. To be considered when decisions are made about their parent
4. To be well cared for in their parent's absence
5. To speak with, see, and touch their parent
6. To support as they face their parent's incarceration
7. Not to be judged, blamed, or labeled
8. To a lifelong relationship with their parent

Minnesota has a long way to go. Let's get moving. The kids deserve it!

Sincerely,

Dawn Beck,

Child of a formerly incarcerated parent
Advocate for the voices of lived-experience

To: Members of the Minnesota Legislature
From: Elders for Infants
Subject: DOC proposals for Family Support staff and Services

March 10, 2022

Elders for Infants want to express their support for the Department of Corrections budget requests for Family Support staff and services to build and maintain positive family connections between incarcerated parents, their children and family members. Research over the last 30 years has documented the importance of incarcerated individuals maintaining positive contact with family members during incarceration to improve successful community reintegration and reduce recidivism. The creation of a Family Support Unit is an important step in building the capacity of the system to partner with community organizations and programs such as Early Childhood Family Education to provide parenting programming on the inside and family support efforts for children and families on the outside. We see this type of support as especially important for families with children prenatal to three. This is a critical time for new family formation and building a positive parent-child relationship. Parents on the inside as well as children and family members on the outside need support to maintain connections and repair relationships.

We also support the request for funds to provide for more frequent communication and support services for incarcerated parents and their family members. Connections through in-person visits, video visits and phone calls are critical tools for maintaining relationships. Investment in technology and policies in concert with the work of staff in a Family Support Unit can build the capacity for positive experiences to occur between incarcerated parents and their children and other family members.

One of our members has provided parenting education services in a MN correctional facility for the last 25 years and has experienced the powerful motivation of men to want to improve their lives so that they can be the fathers that their children desire and need. This legislation would extend the limited services like parenting education, family support and improve communication channels to more parents on the inside and strengthen the community connections on the outside. We see the positive benefits of this legislation for not only incarcerated parents and their children and families but also for long-term community safety. When formally incarcerated parents successfully reintegrate into their families and communities our communities are safer.

Thank you for carefully considering these proposals to support forgotten Minnesota parents, children, and families.

Elders for Infants

Glenace Edwall, Sandy Heidemann, Jane Kretzmann, Jim Nicholie, Glen Palm, Mary Kay Stranik, Katie Williams

Children of Incarcerated Caregivers

Emily Lefholz
Legislative Director
Government and External Relations Unit
Minnesota Department of Corrections

VIA EMAIL ONLY (emily.lefholz@state.mn.us)

Dear Ms. Lefholz:

On behalf of Children of Incarcerated Caregivers (CIC), I am writing in support of the *Family Support and Connection* budget request. Founded 2015, CIC's mission is to help children impacted by parental incarceration thrive. We focus our efforts on legal advocacy and a family program that connects youth to enrichment opportunities and other resources in Minnesota.



Through our direct work with families, CIC sees the impact of parental incarceration reflected in the lives of children and their caregivers who often struggle to cope with the incarceration of a parent. When a parent is incarcerated, in addition to the pain of separation, there is a stunning lack of resources and institutional support for the family members left behind.

Children of Incarcerated Caregivers supports the *Family Support and Connection* budget request, and strongly urges you to allocate these funds. Supporting meaningful connections between incarcerated individuals and their families will benefit youth and caregivers alike. The creation of a family support unit will pay dividends for our community and will lessen the burdens placed on the children and caregivers.

Thank you for your consideration of this important resource for families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Matonich".

Julie Matonich, Founder and Board Chair
Children of Incarcerated Caregivers (CIC)

LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO MINNESOTA PRISONERS (LAMP) & REENTRY CLINICS

"A society should not be judged on how it treats its outstanding citizens, but by how it treats its criminals."
- Fyodor Dostoevsky

Bradford Colbert, Director LAMP
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Jessica Rivera

Jack Fate
Andrew Harris
Tiana Mitten
Jake Skurka

Laine Gebhardt
Noel Jacobson
Samuel Northrup
Tyson Strum
Mitch Zillman

March 14, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of the proposed family support unit within the Minnesota Department of Corrections.

I am the Director of the Legal Assistance to Minnesota Prisoners Clinic at Mitchell Hamline School of Law. In our Clinic we represent incarcerated individuals with civil legal issues, including family law issues.

We have represented hundreds of incarcerated people in their quest to maintain a connection with their children. Although our clients are incarcerated, they want to be involved in their children's lives. This connection is incredibly important to the incarcerated individuals; a connection with their family is a way of establishing, maintaining, and enhancing social support networks. Numerous studies show that both the presence and frequency of prison visits of all kinds are associated with reduced recidivism.

The connection is also invaluable to the children of incarcerated people. Although their parents may be incarcerated, the children still need the connection to their parents and evidence suggests that maintaining this connection will benefit a child's well-being.

The Minnesota Department of Corrections has long played a leading role in recognizing that people who are incarcerated are, in fact, people who are incarcerated and are deserving of our support. The family support unit will continue that tradition.

Thank you for your attention to this letter. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Bradford Colbert

Bradford Colbert



March 14, 2022

Minnesota Fathers and Families Network
Box 225
Forest Lake, MN 55025

To Whom It May Concern,

This letter is in support of the Minnesota Department of Corrections to use legislative budget funds for Family Support and Connection programming. The Minnesota Fathers and Families Network is an established organization that has been dedicated to advocating for father friendly services across the state of Minnesota since 2003. The network was created to represent different sectors of services to fathers and to support practitioners and to inform policy at the state and agency levels through trainings and information sharing about best practices.

The budget requests from the Department of Corrections to invest in connecting families and build and maintain family support units is fully within the mission of MFFN. We know that when families are supported by evidence based programming and resources, in whatever the situation; children are most often the biggest beneficiaries.

Minnesota has had a long history of leadership in fatherhood programs and services. Providing additional funding to support incarcerated parents, particularly fathers, will help Minnesota maintain its leadership role as proving it has a priority in Minnesota families well-being.

The Minnesota Fathers and Families Network will provide support in whatever way we can to help make this programming successful.

Please contact us with any questions.

Thank you.

Nathan Neuhart
Chair
Minnesota Fathers and Families Network

Dear Legislators,

I hope that Minnesota will once again lead the nation in family supporting, cost-saving legislation by including in the Department of Corrections budget a provision to increase investments in parenting support for incarcerated individuals and their families.

DOC research proves that this reduces recidivism, thus reducing state expenditures.

I have personally worked directly with mothers in MCF-Shakopee, and across the nation with incarcerated mothers in Texas, California, Washington, Maryland, Mississippi, Ohio, Florida, and New York, to name a few, and I hear many stories of parental relationships broken from their children.

Creating a family support unit and other investments in connecting families will increase motivation for a law-abiding life, and those children will also far less likely to need social services. This is also supported by DOC evidence-based research.

I know that you have many bills to review and limited funds, but I believe this is the best possible investment for both financial and humanitarian reasons.

I strongly urge the inclusion and passage of family supports in the budget to increase investments in parenting support for incarcerated individuals and their families. This provision will help interrupt the cycle of trauma and intergenerational incarceration.

I look forward to sharing with other states the enlightened leadership of Minnesota.

With respect and hope,
Deborah Jiang-Stein

unPrison Project, Founder/CEO
POB 153
8014 Olson Memorial
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55427
Direct: 612-670-1332



Minnesota Coalition
FOR FAMILY HOME VISITING

March 15, 2022

Representative Carlos Mariani
Chair, Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy
479 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
559 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Mariani and Members of the Committee:

The Minnesota Coalition for Family Home Visiting (MCFHV) is pleased to support the Family Friendly Policies outlined in HF 4191. The Department of Correction's family friendly policies recognize the importance of families, regardless of their current location. The bond between parent and child is critical and providing opportunities for children to connect with a parent while incarcerated helps reduce their stress and trauma.

We support strategies to connect children with families and believe the new family support unit and resources to help families communicate are steps in the right direction. The Family Home Visiting Coalition has seen the benefits to children and parents when they are able to connect through parenting programs. Research also indicates parents are more engaged in rehabilitation when they have contact with their children or engage in programming that helps them parent remotely.

A positive, healthy relationship with a parent or caregiver is the most important factor for successful development in early life. We hope you will join us in supporting these family friendly provisions to encourage positive interactions and learning.

Thank you,

Laura LaCroix-Dalluhn,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura LaCroix-Dalluhn', is written over a horizontal line.

Coordinator



MINNESOTA SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

100 Empire Drive, Suite 222, St. Paul, MN 55103

Phone: 651.451.7216 Fax: 651.451.8087

Email: info@mnsheriffs.org

The Honorable David Pinto, Chair
House Early Childhood Committee
Minnesota State Capitol
75 Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102

Dear Chairman Pinto and Members of the Early Childhood Committee,

We write in support of the proposals to take action to support the children of incarcerated parents. The proposal for the Minnesota Department of Corrections to create a Family Support Unit and to assure that incarcerated parents have frequent communications, visits, phone calls, and support services are important ways to reduce the impact of incarceration on children.

The Model Jail Practices Learning Community is building the capacity and support for evidence-based policy and practice changes in county jails using Federal funding that will end this year. Minnesota should continue to build that capacity with state investment.

In 2018 the Minnesota Sheriffs' Association and the State Community Health Services Advisory Committee (SCHSAC) formed a joint workgroup to study the impact of parental incarceration on children and identify ways that counties can act to reduce the impact and build their resiliency.

One of our first activities was a survey of Minnesota jails to determine how many incarcerated individuals were parents. Nearly every Minnesota county jail participated in this survey which documented that fully three-fourths of the men and women detained or incarcerated in county jails have children under 18. And, we know that from the Minnesota student survey, the most commonly reported Adverse Childhood Experience is having a parent who has been incarcerated.

Minnesota has documented the need and the opportunity to decrease the stress and trauma and build the resiliency of children affected by parents' incarceration. There is also ample evidence that preserving relationships with family members while incarcerated promotes rehabilitation and reduces recidivism for offenders. The proposals before you will be positive steps for Minnesota to take.

We urge support for these proposals.

Sincerely,

William M. Hutton, Executive Director
Minnesota Sheriffs' Association

Sheila Kiscaden

Sheila Kiscaden, Chair
SCHSAC



March 10, 2022

***Sent via Email**

RE: Support for Children and Families of Incarcerated Individuals

Dear Members of the Legislature:

Olmsted County respectfully urges your support for the Department of Corrections (DOC) funding request to support connections between incarcerated individuals and their families and children. Olmsted County is taking a proactive approach at mitigating adverse effects on children of incarcerated parents or caregivers. The number of children impacted by parental and/or guardianship incarceration is growing throughout the state, and the number of BIPOC children within this population is considerably disproportionate.

Research indicates that children of incarcerated parents often struggle with homelessness, poverty, trauma, health concerns, and disparate gaps in their educational experiences. They also have a higher likelihood of being involved in the criminal justice system. Currently two-thirds of youth involved in the juvenile justice system (nationally) have had an incarcerated parent and/or guardian.

Olmsted County believes the DOC proposal for state investments to create a family support unit and to provide more frequent communications is an excellent first step to enhancing support for children and families of incarcerated individuals. Olmsted County also encourages the state to support funding for similar programs in counties throughout the state.

Thank you for your consideration to invest proactively in these programs that will yield positive returns for our children, families, and communities. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Thein", with a long, sweeping underline.

Mark Thein, Chair
Olmsted County Board of Commissioners
thein.mark@co.olmsted.mn.us



Through mentoring, education and support Parenting With Purpose will bring healing, restoration and liberty to families affected by incarceration.

7111 West Broadway, Suite 206
Brooklyn Park, MN 55428
Phone: 763-503-2892
www.parentingwithpurpose.org

March 14, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter of support regarding the proposal to increase funding for support services and increased opportunities for incarcerated individuals to meaningfully engage with their family members, increase parenting programming and expand capacity for families and their communities to create positive connections with incarcerated individuals.

I have been working with incarcerated individuals and their families for 27 years and have seen the extreme importance of family involvement, parent education and continued communication between incarcerated individuals and their families.

I have proven evidence through our outcomes that during and after incarceration, the individuals who have been connected to their children and families are far less likely to recommit crimes.

I fully support this proposal to increase funds for services and a family support unit at the Mn Dept of Corr.

There is absolutely no doubt family support and family preservation leads to reduction in recidivism and promotes rehabilitation. Please support this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lori Strong'.

Lori Strong

Executive Director and Co-Founder

Parenting With Purpose



March 15, 2022

Representative Carlos Mariani
Chair, Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy
479 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
559 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Mariani and Members of the Committee:

The Minnesota Prenatal to Three (PN-3) Coalition is writing in support of the Department of Corrections family friendly policies outlined in HF 4191. The Department of Corrections family friendly policies creates a family support unit to increase meaningful connections between children and their parent(s) who are incarcerated and invest in opportunities to connect with families through in-person visits, phone and/or video visits.

We believe these family friendly provisions support children of families with a parent incarcerated. Too often these children go unnoticed and unserved, and these new supports can help fill a gap in their lives. These provisions, along with policies passed last year through the Healthy Start Act, aim to preserve and protect relationships with family members. Attention to and connection with family can promote rehabilitation among incarcerated family members and can reduce recidivism.

Please join us in supporting this important legislation!

Thank you,

Deb Fitzpatrick,
Children's Defense Funds-MN,
Co-Chair

Nancy Jost,
West Central Initiative,
Co-Chair

Laura LaCroix-Dalluhn,
MN Prenatal to Three (PN-3) Coalition,
Coalition Coordinator

John Poupart

1338 Smith Avenue South

West St. Paul, MN 55118

ogema2001@yahoo.com – 651-260-9229

Emily.lefholz@state.mn.us

3-10-22

This letter is in support of Family Support and Connections. I am a person that has long been involved in the criminal justice system, particularly Corrections. I have spent twenty-five years working for the Department of Corrections, eight of those as Ombudsman for Corrections and after retiring for the DOC, I founded the American Indian Policy Center and retired from there five years ago. I continue to be involved in the corrections field as a volunteer and an advocate for the advancement of new and improved methods to reduce crime and recidivism.

I reviewed the outline for the program that is seeking funding and admire its purpose. Moreover, I believe it is more than the standard approach to corrections programming. It goes beyond the transactional programming, even though its language does include standard boilerplate references used in modern-day corrections programs. I see its beauty more in the transformation programming where mother and child relationship, and the father and child relationship defy heretofore corrections expectations. This psychological impact is many times immeasurable, but its outcomes are something to behold, for they are what are desired among corrections practitioners.

In my years I have encounter Western European thought with American Indian abstract thinking, two different approaches. The approach in this proposed program reminds me of the successes I had over the years in applying the “Indian Mind” to some of the most successful Indian programming I have seen across the nation, including a program I developed here in Minneapolis, the Anishinabe Longhouse, a halfway house especially for American Indians released from prison. This was sponsored by the MN DOC.

I fully endorse and support the FAMILY SUPPORT AND CONNECTIONS request and would testify on its behalf if requested.

Respectfully

John Poupart

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health

University of Minnesota
717 Delaware Street SE
Minneapolis, MN 55414

Department of Pediatrics
Medical School

Phone: 612-625-9907
Fax: 612-626-2134

March 14, 2022

Re: *Family Support and Connection*

Dear Members of the Minnesota Legislature,

I am writing to support my strongest support for the Minnesota Department of Correction's (MnDOC) *Family Support and Connection* proposal. This proposal seeks to provide critical investments in incarcerated parents and their families by 1) creating a much-needed family support unit and 2) increasing opportunities for incarcerated people to have contact with their children and families.

Over the last decade, I have had the opportunity to partner with MnDOC on a number of projects related to children and families. It is through these projects that we have come to learn critical information about the experiences of children and families affected by incarceration in MN. **Most people in MN prisons are parents with minor children.** In our 2014 study of people in MN prisons, we found that nearly 66% of men were fathers and 77% of women were mothers with minor children. We also know that a startling **1 in 6 MN youth have experienced the incarceration of a parent** and they are at increased risk for poor outcomes, including worse physical and mental health, substance use, behavior problems, and challenges at school. Most incarcerated parents report that they're interested in parenting classes, but the reality is that **we simply don't have enough resources to support all of the parents who could benefit.**

The proposed *Family Support and Connection* proposals provides critical funding to create and staff a family support unit within MnDOC. This investment is an important step in supporting incarcerated parents, their children and families, and our communities. MnDOC's proposal is a timely, evidence-based proposal that will have immediate benefits to incarcerated parents.

Sincerely,



Rebecca J. Shlafer, PhD, MPH
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University of Minnesota, Department of Pediatrics
717 Delaware Street SE, 3rd Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55414
Email: shlaf002@umn.edu
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Paul Mattessich

MEMO

TO: Emily Lefholz, DOC Legislative Director
FROM: Julie Atella
RE: Family Support and Connection
DATE: March 16, 2022

Dear Emily,

Please accept this letter of support for the legislative budget request from the Department of Corrections' proposal to increase investments in parenting support for incarcerated individuals and their families.

I have conducted research and evaluation in the area of families impacted by incarceration for over a decade, including working on various collaboratives and committees to address the needs of children and caregivers who have incarcerated loved ones. There is so much that needs to be done to improve the inequities and correct the deficiencies of the systems that impact these families.

Thank you for considering support for this valuable proposal and the envisioned partnerships in supporting parents, children and families impacted by incarceration.

Sincerely,

Julie K Atella

julie.atella@wilder.org

March 17, 2022

Emily Lefholz
DOC Legislative Director
RE: Family Support and Connection Budget Request

Dear Emily Lefholz,

The Junior League of Minneapolis has partnered with the Minnesota Correctional Facility – Shakopee since 2010 around our Between the Lines project*, which strengthens the bond between children and their parents or caregivers during incarceration.

Our focus issue over the past decade has been addressing underlying causes of the opportunity gap (the disparity of opportunities, experiences, and resources across various socioeconomic statuses as well as inequality between different races and ethnicities) which is exacerbated by the familial separation resulting from incarceration.

We support the proposed increased and ongoing investments beginning in FY2023: “Create a Family Support Unit” and “Invest in Connecting Families” requested by the Department of Corrections. From our Between the Lines book recording events with incarcerated women, we deeply understand and agree with the research linking family contact to reduced recidivism as well as increasing positive outcomes for the children and families.

Year after year, our volunteers have had the opportunity to enter the women’s facility in Shakopee with training and significant support from the Department of Corrections Staff. During these events, we hear powerful anecdotes while facilitating book recordings with the incarcerated women for their children. Participants begin their book recordings with earnest introductions and words of encouragement, capturing sweet greetings and personal stories.

One particular story relayed to us centers on a child who would not tell their parent they had listened to the recording; their caregiver shared that the child listened to the recording every night at bedtime. This illustrates some of the difficult experiences and complicated emotions for the children, which can be mitigated through family support programming.

The Junior League of Minneapolis, committed to addressing causes of the opportunity gap, strongly supports increased and ongoing investments in meaningful connections between incarcerated individuals and their families.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Nelson
President, Junior League of Minneapolis



* The Between the Lines project provides children of incarcerated female parent / caregivers an audio recording of their parent / caregiver reading a book to them, a personal message from their parent / caregiver and a new, wrapped, copy of the book. Junior League of Minneapolis volunteers record the incarcerated parent / caregiver, prepare and send the special book / message packages for delivery to the children.

<https://www.jlminneapolis.org/how-we-help/between-the-lines/>

State of Minnesota
Office of Ombudsperson
For AMERICAN INDIAN
Families



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March 16, 2022

To: Minnesota State Legislators

**Re: Department of Corrections Legislation
Investing in What Works: Family Support and Connection**

Aloha,

My name is Jill Kehaulani Esch and I am the State's Ombudsperson for AMERICAN INDIAN Families. Last year, this Legislature created this new agency – the first independent state agency of its kind in The Nation. My statutory role is pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 3.9215. I monitor compliance in cases filed in any of Minnesota's 87 counties, with all laws governing child protection and placement as they impact American Indian children. My duties include ensuring compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act, the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act, the Tribal State Agreement and other applicable rules, statutes and laws.

In my role, I also collaborate with tribes, agencies, counties, community organizations, courts, schools, other organization and stakeholders to develop policies, rules and laws to improve outcomes for American Indian Families involved in the child protection system, as well as collaborating on prevention programs. I am advised and report to the American Indian Community Specific Board, who are all appointed by the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council.

I join with Mr. John Poupart in his strong support to preserve relationships with family members while an individual is incarcerated which leads to stronger community ties, promotes rehabilitation and reduces recidivism.

Last year when Minnesota passed *The Healthy Start Act*, not only was it historic legislation, it gave incarcerated mothers the opportunity to create strong bonds with their children. However, I wanted to share with you a story that happened prior to the legislation passed.

It was around three to four years ago, pre Covid, when I established a relationship with the Shakopee Correctional Facility Parenting Coordinator Lori Timlin. Ms. Timlin was instrumental in having me visit the Facility to meet with the "Women of Shakopee" so that I could educate the mothers of Native children on what their rights were when their children were in child protection. For almost three years, I had a standing monthly appointment from 8:00 am to 10:00 am. We stopped the visits two years ago this month due to Covid and we have not resumed.

Here is the story I wanted to share. One of the Women of Shakopee mothers gave birth to her daughter while she was incarcerated. After her daughter was born, the county social worker refused to allow the mother to have visits with her daughter.

However, after learning the information that I provided, this mother began to re-engage with working her case plan and started having more conversations with her attorney and wrote to her tribe about all the issues in the case. This mother attended her court hearings and continually shared with the Court that she really needed to see her daughter. Finally, after not seeing her daughter since she was born, 14 months later, this mother saw her daughter for the first time! From the pictures that were shared with me, the smile on this mother's face as she held her daughter – now a toddler -- was priceless. The visits then became more regular and today, this mother is back in the community and doing well and she never lost custody of her daughter. Here is what was listed in the Court order from 2020: *“The child is doing well in her mother's care and there are no concerns at this time. It is recommended that custody of the child be returned to the mother and the file be closed.”*

This is why it is important to invest in connecting families and why I encourage Minnesota to make the investment. This mother is a good mother, all she needed was some information and resources and the motivation was her being able to visit with her daughter.

Here is another story, but regarding a father. Last month, I reached out to a father who was in a county jail. A relative had filed a petition to transfer custody of the father's two children to this relative. There was no child protection case. I provided the father with information and resources about reaching out to the county where the third-party custody case had been filed and suggested that he write to the court to ask that he be appointed an attorney as allowed under the Indian Child Welfare Act. This father told me that at that time, he did not have “any money on the books” so that he could even afford a postage stamp. He said that the county jail did not have any means of him earning any type of income and until he could be provided “with free stamps”, he could not send out any letters. The father also told me that he wanted to speak with his children, but he did not have the funds to make such a telephone call.

After speaking with this father, I immediately thought about what could I do in my role and I decided to build a *Circle of Resources for Incarcerated Individuals*. I reached out to a law professor from my law school alma mater, a county social worker from Northern Minnesota who works with incarcerated individuals, Lori Timlin, the Shakopee Correctional Facility Parenting Coordinator, a county police department detective with almost 30 years of experience and a tribal member who was previously incarcerated. These five individuals agreed to be a part of this very important Circle and as soon as the agency which I lead moves into our new office space (hopefully, sometime next month), we will have our first meeting to determine how can we provide resources to incarcerated individuals, especially parents of Native children whose children are in child protection or in out-of-home placement.

I strongly support Minnesota increasing opportunities for incarcerated individuals to meaningfully engage with their family members through more routine contact with loved ones, increasing parenting programming for incarcerated moms and dads and expanded capacity for families and their communities to create positive connections with incarcerated individuals.

Should you have any questions, please let me know.

OFFICE OF OMBUDSPERSON FOR AMERICAN INDIAN FAMILIES

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Ombudsperson for AMERICAN INDIAN Families
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To: Members of the Minnesota House Public Safety Committee
From: Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) representing
Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)
Subject: Proposed Family Support Unit within the Minnesota Department of Corrections
Date: March 9, 2022

The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education strongly supports the proposal which provides for the investment of \$280,000 in FY 2023 and each year ongoing to create a family support unit within the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC). The investment of these funds in a family support unit will provide the DOC with needed staffing capacity to explore and partner on quality programming with community members and organizations. Research over the last 30 years has documented the importance of incarcerated individuals maintaining positive contact with their family members during incarceration. Community-based programs such as Early Childhood Family Education, which serves all families in Minnesota with children 0-5 years of age, can provide parent education and family support for parents on the inside. In addition, they can provide support services for both children and parents of incarcerated family members on the outside. ECFE has a long history of providing parent education to incarcerated parents in Minnesota correctional facilities and county jails. This new unit will provide the agency leadership needed to develop strategies and policies to support meaningful connections between incarcerated individuals and their families through continued and increased collaboration with organizations such as ECFE.

We applaud the work of the individuals and groups who have contributed to this legislative proposal and urge your consideration and approval of it.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

MNAFEE Advocacy Committee Members
Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education