

April 2, 2025

Dear Chair Scott and House Judiciary and Finance Committee Members:

I write to support HF1862, being heard in your committee this week. This bill provides a language adjustment to fully implement the underlying intent of the original bill SF1682 / HF 922 (from the 2023-2024 session). As one of the lead advocates on the original bill, I am thrilled that this bill received a hearing in your committee so that the new Office of Appellate Counsel and Training can be fully implemented.

The right to high-quality legal representation at all stages of child protection proceedings for parents, including those experiencing indigency, is fundamental to safeguarding important interests at stake in the proceedings. Because there is currently no centralized system for appointing appellate counsel, families are unable to effectively advocate for their right to remain together when they believe the district court has erred.

The Office of Appellate Counsel and Training would be an independent, statewide office governed by a seven-member board. The Office would be responsible for administering the appellate program, providing training for all parent attorneys in the state, and coordinating Title IV-E support for counties and tribes in collaboration with DHS.

Additionally, this office will support Minnesota's new MIFPA and MAAFPCWDA laws – which are critical in making sure that all families receive fair process and treatment in our child welfare system.

Thank you for hearing this important bill and I appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Joanna Woolman

Professor of Law

Executive Director Keeping Families Connected Minnesota