

Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage  
658 Cedar Street, Suite G57  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
[cmah@state.mn.us](mailto:cmah@state.mn.us) | 651-757-1750

March 11, 2026

**Co-Chair: Rep. Nolan West 32A**  
**Co-Chair: Rep. Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn 49B;**  
and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

**RE: Testimony in Support of HF 3024 / SF 3154 - Foster Youth Bill of Rights**

Co-Chair Rep. Nolan West, Rep. Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, and Members of the Committee:

The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage (CMAH) respectfully submits this letter in strong support of HF 3024 and SF 3154, which establish a Foster Youth Bill of Rights in Minnesota. These companion bills represent a meaningful and long-overdue step toward ensuring that every young person in foster care particularly those from African heritage communities receives equitable treatment, culturally responsive care, and the protections necessary to thrive.

### **Why This Legislation Matters**

African American and African immigrant youth in Minnesota are:

- Overrepresented in foster care
- Less likely to be placed with kin
- More likely to experience multiple placements
- More likely to have unmet mental health needs
- Less likely to receive culturally grounded services

These disparities are systemic, persistent, and unacceptable. A Foster Youth Bill of Rights provides the structural protections needed to address them.

### **Impact on African Heritage Communities and Youth**

HF 3024 / SF 3154 directly benefits African heritage youth by:

- **Preserving cultural identity** through protections for cultural, religious, and community connections
- **Strengthening kinship placement**, aligning with cultural norms of extended family caregiving
- **Improving access to culturally competent mental health care**, addressing trauma linked to racism, displacement, and family separation
- **Increasing transparency and accountability**, helping rebuild trust in a system that has historically harmed African heritage families
- **Reducing placement instability**, which disproportionately affects African heritage youth and disrupts identity formation

These protections support healing, belonging, and long-term well-being.

## **Key Provisions of HF 3024 / SF 3154**

The bills establish enforceable rights related to:

- Safety and protection from harm
- Access to education, health care, and mental health services
- Placement stability and participation in case planning
- Maintaining cultural and community ties
- Access to personal documents
- Clear processes for reporting concerns or violations

They also ensure youth receive information in developmentally appropriate ways and are supported in advocating for themselves.

## **CMAH's Position**

CMAH strongly supports HF 3024 / SF 3154 because of the bills:

- Advance racial equity
- Protect vulnerable youth
- Strengthen system accountability
- Improve mental health outcomes
- Promote cultural identity and belonging
- Align with national best practices and CMAH's statutory mandate

These protections are not symbolic, they are essential.

## **Conclusion**

Minnesota's foster youth deserve clear rights, consistent protection, and a system that honors their humanity and cultural identity. CMAH urges the Legislature to pass HF 3024 / SF 3154 and stands ready to support implementation.

Sincerely,

Linda Sloan | Executive Director  
Lolita Davis Carter | Legislative & Policy Director  
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 State of Minnesota's political, social, and economic resources, policies, and procedures. 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.*



**An association of resources and advocacy for children, youth and families**  
[www.aspiremn.org](http://www.aspiremn.org)

March 10, 2026

Dear Co-Chair Kotyza-Witthuhn, Co-Chair West and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

AspireMN is a statewide association of children and family serving organizations with delivery of care in children's mental health, child welfare, and a variety of service models oriented to provide early intervention for families, meet critical needs and promote family preservation.

We appreciate the leadership from this committee in advancing HF3024 and recognizing the importance of honoring youth voices, responding to adverse experiences, and establishing clear language in statute that affirms the rights that all children and youth should have while in foster care.

Children and family service providers are often delivering care to children and youth during their experiences in foster care – across the service continuum. AspireMN supports Quality Parenting Initiative-MN and the key values of lived experience leadership, research-informed service and meaningful relationships as necessary for excellence in foster care and truly our full continuum of children and family services.

Based on experiences of serving and supporting children and youth in foster care, AspireMN supports HF3024 and establishing Minnesota's Foster Youth Bill of Rights.

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

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Shawna Bullen-Fairbanks and I'm a former foster youth with lived experience. I'm 23 years old and I aged out of the foster care system six years ago- a couple months before the COVID-19 pandemic started. I spent ten years in and out of the foster care system from 7-17 years old. I've been placed throughout the state of Minnesota. The importance and impact of the Foster Care Bill of Rights is imminent and of utmost importance to all current Foster Youth that are in the Minnesota Child Welfare system as I write this email. Not all of them can speak for themselves even as the Foster Youth Bill of Rights is being proposed because a lot of them do not even know they have rights or are unaware of the rights they do have in our state, because there is no official documentation/letter where it's all in one place, and too often Foster youth are confused about what and what they can't do- a lot are afraid to report abuse or neglect because they do not know how or their rights or the direct procedures around it. A lot do not even know that advocacy and legislation happens about them- I know I didn't when I was in Foster Care. When rights are clear, direct and concise we all benefit as a state and as a system because it's more clear. If the Foster Youth Bill of Rights was passed, we'd see less court involvement with settlements or suing, we'd see less youth deaths like suicide, or due to neglect/abuse, foster youth would learn the importance of what it means to practice and exercise their rights and what is legal and what is not, a lot less foster youth would also get in a lot less legal trouble throughout our state, not only would it help foster youth but it would also help the state's revenue and how hurt the state is in this current economic state of our country and during the fiscal year I believe, but most of all Foster Youth deserve to not live in fear anymore of knowing what they can and can't do. I believe if I had a Foster Youth Bill of Rights I was able to follow, my experience in Foster Care would've been less chaotic and I would've been able to know any kinds of things I could do, what kind of support I could reach out for and I don't think I would've experienced the Juvenile Justice System had I known my rights clearly and concisely. I am asking the Chair and Committee for their direct support and consideration on voting in favor of this bill because the future of Foster Youth, the next generations, the state of Minnesota and this nation depends on it. I also wanted to thank the Chair and Committee for their time and consideration on reading my email in support of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights. It means the world.

Gratefully,

Shawna Bullen-Fairbanks

[Sbullenfairbanks@gmail.com](mailto:Sbullenfairbanks@gmail.com)

218-508-1468

Lived Experience Expert, Change-maker, Published Author, Spoken Word Poet, Artist, Advocate, Activist, Workshop Facilitator, and Public Speaker

**From:** Sofia Ali <doctorsofi.ali5@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Tuesday, March 10, 2026 11:22 PM

**To:** Colie Colburn <colie.colburn@house.mn.gov>

**Subject:** Urging the committee to pass HF3024/SF3154 foster youth bill of rights

Hello,

I am a Family Physician who has worked in community clinics in the Twin Cities for decades. I have had opportunities to care for children who have been in the foster care system. There are countless stories of children being further traumatized within the foster care system meant to protect them.

I urge the committee to pass this excellently crafted bill to help prevent many of the egregious abuses that have been perpetuated upon children and youth in the foster system.

The common sense protections in this bill are long overdue and are simply human decency.

I urge the committee to pass this bill and thank the chair and committee for standing up to protect children.

Sincerely,

Sofia Ali, MD, MPH