

Chair. Rena Moran

477 State Office Building

St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: African American Family Preservation Act

Dear Committee Members,

The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage offers the following statement in support of HF 342. We believe this bill addresses the current disparities that exist in the child welfare system in a way that not only protects the best interests of African American children but also promotes the stability and security of African American families.

In 1983, the Minnesota Legislature became the first legislative body in the country to adopt specific statutory language to clarify adoption and foster care policy on the placement of minority children with the creation of the Minority Child Heritage Protection Act. This law established an order of preference for placement of minority children. Relatives were given priority, followed by adults who shared the same racial or ethnic heritage as the child children. The safeguards and protections that were instituted with this legislation are non-existent today and racial disparities are still persistent and are present in the entire process; from initial reporting, screening and assessment to discharge from the system.

Currently, youth of African Heritage are removed from their homes at an alarming rate and a large number are crossing over from child protection into the juvenile justice system. Children of African Heritage are over 3 times more likely than their white counterparts to be reported to child protection services. In the face of the same allegations and behavior; children of African Heritage 2 and children of 2 or more races are removed from their home at a rate 3.1 and 4.8 times higher than their white counterparts. Worse, once maltreatment has been substantiated, white families with the same or more egregious allegations are more likely to receive services that allow their children to remain in the home, while children of African Heritage are removed from their parents, siblings and loved ones. Additionally, more often than their white counterparts black parents are put on a punitive track that can lead to a loss of housing, employment and increased risk of further child protection involvement.

In order to address the myriad of issues and disparities that exist, the ideal solution must incorporate a holistic multigenerational approach and the Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage endorses the African American Family Preservation Act for that very reason. . Everyone has a stake in ensuring Minnesota's Child Protection system is fair and equitable. Healthy families are vital to the success of our children and ultimately, our state.

Thank you,

Justin Terrell

Executive Director, Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage



An association of resources and advocacy for children, youth and families

1919 University Avenue, Suite 450, St. Paul, MN 55104

www.aspiremn.org

February 15, 2019

To whom it may concern:

AspireMN members serve children, youth and families statewide. Member organizations place high priority on practice and policy that can address disparities across all systems, and, specifically address the disproportionate number of youth of color being served in out of home placement.

Out of our observations that trends have not improved but instead worsened in past years, and our commitment to advance strategies that meaningful address disparities, this letter is to articulate the support of the association for the broad goals outlined in the African American Family Preservation Act. Specifically, AspireMN agrees that Minnesota needs policies and resources that assure youth of color and specifically African American children and youth are not inappropriately removed. Where possible Minnesota should be seeking to support families to meet unique needs and sustain the integrity of the family. When removal is required due to egregious harm and acute risk of harm, efforts must be made for children and youth to be cared for by kin in their communities of origin whenever possible.

Through discussion of the African American Family Preservation Act this year, we hope to see agreements develop to achieve these shared goals for African American children, youth and families.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Anderson Executive Director

Our colleagues at the Minneapolis NAACP and Village Arms have recently introduced a bill; the MN African American Family Preservation Act, authored by Representative Moran and Senator Hayden.

Racial disparities (across the nation, and in MN) are long standing, egregious and well-documented. Racial disparities are found in the entire process, from initial reporting, screening and assessment to discharge from the system.

Consider:

- African American children are over 3 times more likely than their white counterparts to be reported to child protective services
- Incidences statewide of white children assessed by child protection is 13.6 per 1000, compared to 42.7 per 1000 for African American children
- African American and children of 2 or more races are *removed* from their home at a rate 3.1 and 4.8 times higher than their white counterparts
- African American children are the highest population of children moving from child protection to juvenile detention

As leaders in the child welfare field we urge you to support this bill and keep African American families safely together. We know that traumatic separation from a primary caregiver can lead to – abysmal outcomes that cost exponentially more than it does to support a struggling family.

This Act will not only stop the arbitrary removal of children from their homes but would also strengthen families and save the state money. This Act would work to address disparities at every decision point while providing guidance and oversight to child protection staff.

Please pass this important legislation to support the preservation and well-being of African American families in MN.

Thank you for your time and service,

sha Justro

Indra Lusero

Executive Director, Elephant Circle

As your constituent who resides at (4820 Jefferson St, Minneapolis MN 55421) and as a Black mother, I am asking that you sign on and fully support SF 730, HF 342- Minnesota African American Families Preservation Act that is authored by Senator Hayden and Representative Moran.

The MN African American Families Preservation Act would serve to:

- Protect children and strengthen families
- Reduce the cost of child welfare services and out of home placement
- Reduce law enforcement and judicial systems costs for intervention
- Improve the mental health and social functioning for African American children
- Improve the child protection department efficacy

I know you are the Senator and have the authority to bring this bill forward. I fully expect you to do such AND support it as it is a high concern of black people and all of those of African descent.

I expect that you read this email in its entirety, reach out if you have questions, respond to me in a timely manner of receipt with your stance on this concern, as well as take action to bring to committee and support.

Thank you for your time and your service to me and all of your constituents.

Respectfully,

Kelli Hullaby

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Thank you for your time and service,

Hello,

My name is Kelis Houston; founder of Village Arms, a Christ centered non profit that works to assist Black families impacted by child protection. I'm reaching out with an urgent ask.

I've been fighting for child welfare reform for 6 years. 20-40 hrs (or more) a week on my own time and dime. I got started while working for Hennepin county's central intake shelter. This was the first stop for children just removed from home. It was there that I saw, more often than not, that 100% of the youth in shelter were African American. They were always with us for much longer periods of time than White youth and several would return 3-4 times a year before aging out of the system; but this was just the tip of the iceberg. It was a culmination of all the ways in which I witnessed this system (child protection) harm children that I decided I couldn't sit in silence about it.

I watched too many children mentally deteriorate after separation from their parents, family and community. I can't tell you the number of kids that would run away from shelter to return to their families (if they could find them). Those that had been in the system so long that they were no longer able to locate relatives or kin were the ones that ran to adult men (some predators) and/or out of state never to be seen or heard from again.

I sat in on too many "goodbye" meetings with parents and their children. What is a goodbye meeting? This is a meeting arranged by the county where child and parent are placed in a room and the parent is instructed to tell their child this is the last time I will ever see you or talk to you. Not because he/she is an abusive parent, no, its becasue they couldn't beat the 6-12month permanency timeline to rectify whatever issue brought their case in.

For Black families it was so called neglect (inadequate food, clothing or shelter). OR the parent didn't complete the laundry list of case plan requirements (a case plan that consists of a rule 25, weekly drug tests, a psych eval, a parenting assessment, IQ tests for some, weekly individual therapy, family therapy, weekly 1 hour visits with the children and whatever else the social worker decides is suitable to "fix" the parent) This is in addition to their search for housing and/or employment OR their work schedule and on public transportation. This is a standard (cookie cutter) case plan for all parents, no matter the allegation.

Child Protection statute mandates that the parent create the case plan WITH social services, but this NEVER happens. If it did, I'm confident we'd see much more meaningful "services" for the family.

This goodbye meeting and permanent separation of child and parent, child and kin, child and community after a termination of parental rights is NOT mandated by law; its just a bad practice amongst counties. The children that suffer this separation (no matter the race) are never provided therapy to address the trauma of removal.

In shelter, the children subjected to this practice would stop speaking, eating, start fighting or all of the above. At this time they'd be provided medication or a med increase. Some would go into deep depression, refusing to get out of bed, shower or engage in programming. One of the worst cases was a young lady about 10 years old that did all of the above but also started to regularly defecate herself. She was eventually sent out of state into a mental health facility. I still pray for her.

Management would call me to the lobby to remove crying children from irate mothers because I could generally calm them both. The last mother whose child I took, when she was able to speak, told me as she passed me her baby that "that bitc#" (the social worker) don't know how to talk to people, she called my house and I hung up in her face. She showed up with the police and told me to bring all of my kids here or go to jail".

This mom was accompanied by several family members; none of which were allowed to keep her children, 4 kiddos in total, who were all well dressed and kempt but understandably hysterical. They were all young and shipped off right away so I don't know if she ever got them back but I still think about her.

I started researching the shelter's data and found that at one point in time over 60% of the children brought in on 72 hour holds were being taken from ONE neighborhood in North Mpls. In addition the majority of children placed for any ANY length of time were ALWAYS Black.

Hearing story after story about the abuse and deaths in foster homes of children removed from NON ABUSIVE PARENTS, I headed to the capitol. Testifying, reaching out to county and state officials about the wrongful removals, high out of home placement rates and disparate treatment of families of African descent.

In 2014 I was already there; doing just that, when Eric Dean (a Caucasian 4 yr old child) was murdered by his step mother. All of a sudden there was an influx of people (legislators, county officals, dhs and even the governor's office) outraged that this young man was killed after child protection received 15 calls that he was being beaten.

The removal rate increased by 50%, BUT its Black and Native children with far less egregious allegations that have faced this traumatizing reaction.

The counties say they like to "err on the side of caution" yet they arent removing White children at similar rates.

Everyone disappeared and we're left to deal with the fallout. If you don't know enough or arent paying attention you'll believe the narrative that the increase in removals is due to opioid use, but again, they aren't removing White children at the same rate.

The result of Eric Dean's death and the governors task force recommendations was an exacerbation of an issue we were already fighting to address. MN is taking too many children of color **without** cause and **due process**. I served as a guardian ad litem for 3 years and I can tell you the courts play a role in this as well; it is truly a systemic issue.

We need the African American Family Preservation Act to ensure our families are treated equal and our children kept safe.

I am reaching out beacuse I have faith that our elected officials value family over politics and beuracracy.

Child Welfare Disproportionately is a long standing national issue. We need your help in passing the MN African American Family Preservation Act as a bold statement that MN values all families. We have the opportunity to become a model for other parts of our country battling the same issue.

We have over 21k signatures in support of the bill (petition link below) and letters of support from orgs such as the ICWA law center and Aspire MN, local community members, allies and national organizations. I ask that as this bill passes through that you sign on in support of an innovative legislative approach to end a decades old matter. Thank you in advance.

Warmly,

Kelis Houston Village Arms armsopen@outlook.com

https://www.thepetitionsite.com/399/216/136/african-american-preservation-act/

As your constituent who resides at <u>3544 Genevieve Ave N Oakdale MN 55128</u> and as a mother, I am asking that you sign on and fully support SF 730, HF 342- Minnesota African American Families Preservation Act that is authored by Senator Hayden and Representative Moran.

The MN African American Families Preservation Act would serve to:

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Thank you for your time and your service to me and all of your constituents.

Respectfully, Chivon Johnson As your constituent who resides at

44 East George Street saint Paul Minnesota 55107 and as a mother concerned constituent) I am asking that you sign on and fully support SF 730, HF 342- Minnesota African American Families Preservation Act that is authored by Senator Hayden and Representative Moran.

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2/25/19

Chair. Jim Abeler

95 University Avenue W.

Minnesota Senate Bldg, Room 3215

St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: African American Family Preservation Act

Dear Committee Members,

As your constituent who resides at <u>3226 Nevada Ave N Crystal, MN 55427</u> and as a <u>Mother</u> I am asking that you sign on and fully support SF 730, HF 342- The Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act that is authored by Senator Hayden and Rep Moran.

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I know you are the <u>Chair of the Senate Judiciary</u> and have the authority to bring this bill forward. I fully expect you to do such AND support it as it is a high concern of black people and all of those of African descent.

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Sincerely,

Sierra Williams

Chair Rena Moran

Health and Human Services Policy Division

477 State Office Building

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Thank you for your time and your service to me and all of your constituents.

Sincerely,

Sierra Williams



February 21, 2019

National Advocates for Pregnant Women (NAPW) is a nonprofit organization working to secure the human and civil rights, health and welfare of pregnant and parenting women and their families. We write, as the legislature considers the proposed African American Family Preservation Act (HF 3973), to express our concern about Minnesota's child welfare system and the need for drastic reform.

The state's child welfare system as it has evolved is far from the original vision of programs that would support families in need. The system instead scapegoats and harms many low income families and communities of color. We believe the system is so faulty and ill-equipped that it requires fundamental change.

Pregnant women we assist in Minnesota and around the country too often avoid seeking help from service providers for fear of being accused, once their babies are born, of child abuse or neglect. Once they are involved in the child welfare system, even when parents are doing their best to satisfy requirements, they are often separated from their babies and children unnecessarily and for too long. Pregnant women tackling substance use disorders in particular are often set back by unnecessary child welfare requirements that defy medical best practices and common sense. The families we assist experience the system not as helpful but rather as punishing, threatening, and counter to what they and their children need.

It is clear that race-based disparities in the ways in which families interact with child welfare also expose African American families, Indigenous families, and other communities of color to this kind of trauma at higher rates than their white counterparts. We encourage you to keep these facts in mind as you consider legislative reforms.

Respectfully submitted,

National Advocates for Pregnant Women Nancy Rosenbloom, Director of Legal Advocacy Indra Lusero, Staff Attorney As your constituent who resides at 200 West Olyth St. 28N and as a Supporter asking that you sign on and fully support SF 730, HF 342- The Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act that is authored by Senator Hayden and Rep Moran.

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Respectfully, April Freeman

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redus Films

As your constituent who resides at Hulbon, WI and as a Supporter I am asking that you sign on and fully support SF 730, HF 342- The Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act that is authored by Senator Hayden and Rep Moran.

The MN African American Family Preservation Act would serve to:

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mullulu 2/13/19

EDEN PRAIRIE and as a Supporten lam As your constituent who resides at 7465 Milculi Rd asking that you sign on and fully support SF 730, HF 342- The Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act that is authored by Senator Hayden and Rep Moran.

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Mi chelle Kalkbrenner

Brookly Menter; WN 55430 As your constituent who resides at 5737 Dopent Auz No and as a Supporter asking that you sign on and fully support SF 730, HE 342- The Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act; that is authored by Senator Hayden and Rep Moran.

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99. Cayla Banks
100. Anthorn Corston

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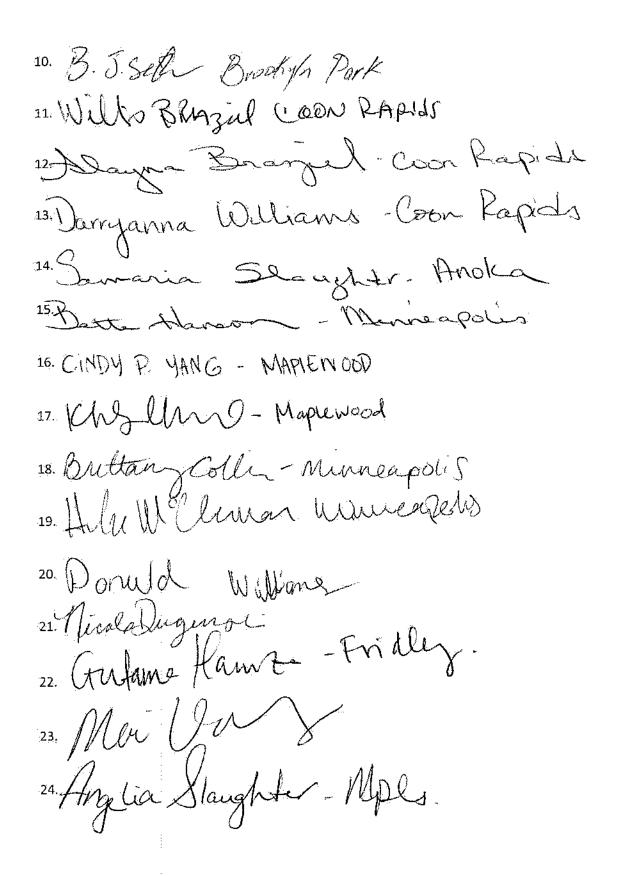
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