



# SAFE PASSAGE

March 17, 2025

Representative Dave Pinto

Co-Chairs, Rep. Nolan West, Rep. Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

Subject: Safe Passage Support of Bill HF2135

As a rapidly growing coalition of concerned citizens and frontline professionals with experience caring for children who have been victims of neglect and abuse, we write in support of HF2135.

We are all aware that the child protection system is complex, fragmented and in need of improvement. Additional funding mechanisms could mean the difference between the highest standards of children getting the care and services they need. It's critical to have a better understanding of all the funding sources available, how they could be shared equitably across the state, and ensure they are delivered to the children and families who need them most.

We have been providing consistent input to this bill for over a year. It is critical that DCYF work to engage with the public to ensure transparency of the process of robust funding streams and prioritization, fair and equitable appropriation and delivery. There is growing, significant interest and contribution from the public and major companies to ensure accelerated investments are made in our child welfare system. DCYF can grow the capabilities of their organization by collaborating with the public and together 'walk the talk' about a true commitment to 'putting children first.'

We are also passionate that DCYF make the investments in their own operating culture and their workforce. We have encouraged that the consultant investment and deliverable include transference of knowledge competencies to the right people in the DCYF organization so they can sustain the work team deliverables.

Lastly, Safe Passage Coalition is rich in child welfare professionals, stakeholders, lived experience and process improvement mindsets and competencies. We would welcome having a Safe Passage Coalition member be added to the consultant work team.

We support the passage of HF2135. Please make it a priority to hear this bill in your committee. We owe it to children at highest risk for abuse and neglect to ensure every dollar is available to support and protect them and we commit to long term collaboration with you. This bill is a very important first step.

Sincerely,

Melissa DeBilzan

Interim Executive Director, Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota

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March 17, 2025

Representative West and Representative Kotyza-Witthuhn  
Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

RE: HF 2135

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

On behalf of the Minnesota Association of County Social Services Agencies (MACSSA) and the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), we offer support for HF 2135, a bill that directs the Commission of Children, Youth and Families to conduct a Child Welfare fiscal analysis, program and practice evaluation with program recommendations.

Minnesota is a state supervised, and county administered system, including 11 sovereign tribal nations and 87 counties. The funding mechanisms and frameworks for child welfare funding are complex. In Minnesota, counties carry a greater level of funding of services than the state, using local tax levy dollars. Based on a 2023 report from [Child Trends](#), Minnesota ranks in the bottom 10 of states for state investments in child welfare. Further estimates indicate that Minnesota counties are responsible for between 41 - 45% of the funding in the child welfare area, with the state and federal government sharing the majority of the remaining amount.

Notably, there are areas where Minnesota may not be capturing federal funds available or sharing and disbursing federal and state funds in equitable ways across the state. Also, opportunities exist where Minnesota could build capacity and knowledge to better invest in preventative services to help children and more effectively develop an array of services to meet child and family needs. Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) is an example of this – the federal law passed over six years ago and unfortunately, while Minnesota as a system has implemented out of home placement policy requirements, as a state, we have yet to benefit from Title IVE funding available through implementing prevention services, due largely to claiming and administrative challenges.

AMC and MACSSA strongly support a comprehensive fiscal analysis of Minnesota's child welfare system, with accompanying program recommendations and urges lawmakers to support this critical work.

Sincerely,



Angie Thies  
Child Wellbeing Policy Analyst  
Association of Minnesota Counties



Matt Freeman  
Executive Director, MACSSA  
Human Services Policy Analyst, AMC

Cc: Representative Dave Pinto

Chair Nolan West  
Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee  
Minnesota House of Representatives

March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Dear Chair West and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee:

We write today in support of bill HF2135.

Minnesota is a state supervised and country administered system that includes 11 sovereign tribal nations and 87 counties. The funding mechanisms and frameworks that allow child welfare funding to flow from the federal government to the state and then to counties and tribes are complex. There are areas where Minnesota may not be capturing funds available or sharing and disbursing them in equitable ways across the state. Also, there are ways Minnesota could build capacity and knowledge to better invest in preventative services to help children.

This bill provides a road map for MN to first get a baseline analysis of our funding mechanisms (including the critical question about the amount of increased state funding needed to truly support a high-quality system). It will also provide a second tier or scaffolding in the form of a practice model and program recommendations to ensure that we are spending money in a way that supports preventative services to help families and communities before they enter the child welfare system. Other states have utilized this type of strategy and have seen very positive results both in increased funding opportunities – but also more effective and equitable practices.

There have been robust engagement efforts with many stakeholders ahead of this bill being introduced. This includes direct engagement and collaboration with Leech Lake, and other tribal partners, the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA), Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), The Minnesota Department of Human Services, community advocacy groups, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Foster Youth, and direct service providers who treat our families in the community. The timing of this bill and effort are especially critical as the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families is just being launched. The bill requires consultation with tribes and gives tribes an option about whether or not to participate. Additionally, the bill includes tribal participation in the decision about who to elect as the external consultant.

This is an opportunity that Minnesota should lean into – as a way to ensure that not only are we accessing all available federal and state funds but also to reassure the public and those impacted by child welfare that we are doing all we can to invest in an effective and culturally appropriate prevention service array. The return on investment in this approach has great potential.

This bill is not just about the money – at its core it is a commitment to the thousands of children and families caught up in our child welfare system that we are doing everything we can to ensure all families have access to the services and support they may need no matter what part of the state they live in.

For these reasons, we ask you to join us in supporting HF2135 to help improve the child welfare system for children and families across Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Joanna Woolman, Keeping Families Connected Minnesota

Kirsten Anderson on behalf of Aspire, MN

Suzanne Arntson, MSW, Deputy Director, on behalf of Scott County Health & Human Services

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council

Rena Moran, Ramsey County Board of Commissioners

Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson Misty Coonce

Ann Hill, Office of Ombudsperson for Families

Dr. Traci LaLiberte, on behalf of the Multidisciplinary Institute for Child Welfare

Sheri Riemers, Executive Director, Ain Dah Yung (Our Home) Center

Muriel Gubasta, Office of Ombudsperson for Families

Lingia Cushman, CEO, Families Rising

Lainie Janke, Executive Director, Therapeutic Services Agency