

March 9, 2021

Dear Members of the House Human Services Finance and Policy Committee,

My name is Tracey Swanson and I am Foster Care Program Director for Village Ranch. Please receive the following statement of support for HF1420.

After having been in this work for about 20 years, I do not think I fully grasped the complexities of relative caregiver cases and the level of support needed for children and families, until recently as we have been providing more support to relative caregivers. The work has been incredible, so eye opening and so real to see what families go through. Recently, we have been working with two families with relative placements and I have been astounded by what I have learned through this process, including:

- Families feel uncomfortable asking questions of placing workers, many families feel threatened by the child protection process
- Obviously, which we already know, county placing social workers do not have the time to offer relative caregivers the supports they need
- Families do not understand the court process, services which may be in place or need to be put in place, a child's reaction to placement, trauma, attachment, trust, etc.
- There is on-going education that relative caregivers require and desire in caring for children
- Families need support in navigating family relationships when they step up to be a relative caregiver option. Many families do not understand case plans, treatment plans, medications, educational support, psychiatric support

I see greater demands on relative caregivers from placing workers such as demanding the parent visit in the home when there are safety issues, and expecting the family knows how to navigate services. Additional support is needed in navigating extended family relationships. Often relative caregivers are viewed by other family members as being the reason for placement.

Relative caregivers need to have consistent support in place, someone they feel comfortable with, and can contact anytime they need support.

For the relative caregivers we are currently working with, the county social workers have informed me if the family was not with our agency for support, they feel the placement would have disrupted. I agree and have felt strongly for a long period of time, this should be the process. We receive far too many referrals of disrupted kinship placements. If the work is done on the front end, I can imagine the impact and success. Most importantly we will not have children having multiple moves and increased trauma attachment issues.

With support, I have witnessed relative caregiver embrace and provide incredible care, watched relationships with birth parents and extended family members become healthier and stronger, and commitment to reunification/permanency. I encourage your support for HF1420 to provide needed support to Minnesota's relative caregivers.

Sincerely,

Tracy Swanson