March 22, 2022

Representative Jennifer Schultz
Human Services and Finance Committee

RE: Support of HF4217

Dear Chair Schultz and Committee Members,

On behalf of Mn ADOPT, I am respectfully submitting this letter in support of HF4217, which is being heard by the House Human Services Finance and Policy Committee on Wednesday, March 23, 2022. As an organization that provides supports for children in foster care and those under guardianship of the Commissioner of Human Services, we believe that the needs of children in foster care to remain connected to their communities should be significant priority for the state of Minnesota and our child welfare community.

We believe that when a child is not able to remain with their family, the first option considered should be for the child to be in the care of a relative or other person known to them, and that these kinship caregivers should receive services designed to ensure success and wellbeing. In our work with relatives and kinship caregivers, we know this is not always the case. The proposed services outlined in HF4217 is an important step in addressing some of these gaps and ongoing needs.

In our role overseeing Minnesota's State Adoption Exchange, we see firsthand that children of color are overrepresented in the Minnesota foster care system, while families of color are simultaneously underrepresented as caregivers. This has been a long-term systematic challenge, and we firmly believe that in order to have a strong foster care system that adequately meets the needs of children, we must do a better job of recruiting foster parents that are reflective of the communities and cultures of children in care. The Recruitment Specialist, as outline in HF4217, is an important step in allowing us to do this in a collaborative way on a statewide basis.

We are excited about the proposed services and supports included in HF4217, and hope that will consider making these important changes on behalf Minnesota children.

Sincerely,

Rachel Walstad
Executive Director
MN ADOPT