

February 25, 2025

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Duluth, MN

RE: HF 1276 Northstar Care for Children

Dear Committee Members,

Warm regards and thank you for your interest in making sure children coming out of foster care have the financial support they need to help provide for their needs for things like food, shelter, access to enrichment activities that can help to start the healing from the many traumas while separated in foster care and before foster care.

This letter is in support of equalizing the payment that goes to kinship caregivers of children under 6 years old. As Julie Murray, Jennifer Ehrle Macomber and Rob Geen note in “Estimating Financial Support for Kinship Caregivers” published in An Urban Institute Program to Assess Changing Social Policies, “half of children in kinship care live in families with income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.” Paying **half** the rate for children under 6 that families get when children are in foster care and **half** the rate of what children older than 6 get means families have to say no to caring for their relatives for a very common reason, being poor.

I have a friend in this situation right now. She wants to be a support to her family, but is already barely making it financially with her own children. Taking on one more child, navigating the challenge of finding daycare, providing housing for one more child are all examples of the financial calculus that families need to make when looking to care for any relative, even more so when looking at bringing in a young child that they will care for over a very long period of time. Wages don't go up when you bring in a child. Rent and mortgages aren't cheaper. Young children are also not cheaper to care for, they need diapers, daycare, formula, and clothing for their many growth spurts. These are the bare minimum and does not at all approximate the lives that wealthier families are able to provide.

The current rates mean low- income families cannot make this choice to be a placement option if children are not able to go back to their birth families. We only have 17% of children going to relative/kinship care (Cain, E., Children's Home Society of Minnesota).

We already know that many known and close relatives are blocked from being placement options because of legal histories or other challenges, this means every last opportunity to keep kids with their loved ones is critical and we need to look at the barriers. We see that the Upjohn Institute's study “shows child outcomes for adopted children ages 6 years old and older increased by around 30 percent with additional financial incentives for parents” (Keefer, 2024). The increased funding helped more children be placed out of foster care -up 29 percent, academic achievement went up 31 %, children had reduced problems in school (Keefer, W, 2024). If we have a chance to prevent even more trauma at the youngest ages, why wouldn't we do this?

Thank you for consideration of the impact of this lower rate and the challenges this causes families. Thank you for finding ways to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and families so they can heal and be successful as we know that children placed in kinship care have a chance to do better than children placed in non-family homes in terms of placement stability, mental health issues (Iglehart, A. in “Kinship foster care: Placement, service, and outcome issues”)

Regards,

Jnana Hand

“Common Challenges that Kinship Caregivers Face”

1. Financial Challenges
2. Emotional and Psychological Challenges
3. Legal and Custody Issues
4. Educational Challenges
5. Health and Well-being Concerns
6. Lack of Information and Training
7. Housing Instability

<https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Departments/DHS/Child-Family-Services/Child-Welfare/Kinship-Navigation/Common-Challenges-That-Kinship-Caregivers-Face>

Other Sources:

Cain, E. (2021) Infographic: Foster Care in Minnesota 2021 Statistics .  
<https://chlss.org/blog/infographic-foster-care-in-minnesota-2021-statistics/>

Iglehart, A. Kinship foster care: Placement, service, and outcome issues.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740994900183>

Keefer, W. “A look at Minnesota Adoption Policy Change. Is it Working?”  
<https://www.minnpost.com/state-government/2024/07/a-look-at-minnesota-adoption-policy-change-is-it-working/>

Murray, J. et al. Estimating Financial Support for Kinship Caregivers.  
<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/57846/311126-Estimating-Financial-Support-for-Kinship-Caregivers.PDF>