



*... because every child needs a permanent, loving, and culturally sensitive family*

March 9, 2021

Dear Human Services Finance and Policy Committee Members:

We at the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) are writing in support of HF 1420, which would ensure that children who need foster care placements in Minnesota have the best possible chance of being placed with their relatives and kin.

We know from years of experience that children fare best when they are able to remain within their kinship circle. Research has shown that relative placements can reduce the trauma of removal, maintain children's connections with family and community, and promote placement stability and child well-being.

There are several reasons kinship caregivers need additional support. First and foremost, in the majority of cases they were not planning to take in a child in foster care. They are asked to make life-altering, complex decisions quickly. Programs like that supported by HF 1420 would help caregivers make these decisions and ensure community-based providers are available to walk them through the process of getting licensed and finding supports to meet the child's needs.

The bill would also expand efforts to find relatives for children in and entering care. Around the country, family finding programs, like those the bill would support, have been able to identify and engage dozens of connections for each child, expanding the likelihood that children can remain with their extended family. This work is specialized and can be time-consuming, and funding community-based providers to do the work will allow caseworkers to focus on children's other needs.

But seeking kin isn't the end of what we need to do to support children in foster care and adoption. NACAC also supports an amendment to the bill that would establish a program to fund diligent recruitment efforts through grants to organizations such as community-based nonprofits, tribes, and other entities with a record of working with families in communities of color.

In those cases where relatives are not able to take a child in, the state needs to find another qualified foster or adoptive family. Federal law requires that states "provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed."

We need to do better at recruiting foster and adoptive families in general, but particularly for children of color. Right now, too many children are in group care (12 percent of all Minnesota

foster children were in group care in 2019, including 21 percent of American Indian children and 15 percent of African American children). And Minnesota's foster and adoptive families do not reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children in the state's care. In federal fiscal year 2019, more than one-quarter of children of color were placed with white parents, while only 1 percent of white children were placed with families of color, clearly demonstrating that we do not have families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state.

HF 1420, as amended, would ensure that children are placed with supported relatives whenever possible, and would help keep them connected to their communities and their culture when relative placement isn't able to be done. We encourage you to pass this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Boo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Boo  
Executive Director