



February 27, 2023

To: Members of the House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

Re: HF1661

Dear Chair Pinto and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share **Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota's support of HF1661**. The provision of robust statewide services and support for informal kinship caregivers will enable more families to identify services and supports to meet the needs of the children they are raising, and meet their own needs, for the safety and stability of these family arrangements preventing the need for child welfare involvement. LSS is a provider of essential services across all 87 counties with more than 2,500 employees who serve one in 65 Minnesotans every year. We are committed to innovative, person-centered service delivery that promotes resilience and long-term stability for people in all stages of life.

We know the need for these services. The LSS Kinship Family Support Services team provides a variety of services to Minnesota kinship caregivers. This includes a full-time warmline, intensive case management for kin families (primarily in the Metro), one-time help with basic needs items, outreach and educational services throughout the state, relative and kinship support groups (online groups statewide, in-person groups in the metro), and a Kinship Advisory Council. Kinship families seek resources to guide them through changing family dynamics, caring for the child of a relative or friend, raising a child who may have experienced trauma, or accessing specific training such as navigating legal or medical issues.

According to a [2021 Minnesota GrandFacts fact sheet](#)¹, 79,096 children are living in homes where a relative is the head of household. Of that total, 18,126 are grandparents who are responsible for their grandchildren in Minnesota. Further, for every ONE child raised by kin in foster care, there are SIX being raised by kin *outside* of foster care. Kin placements, whether informal or formal, can bring both emotional and financial stress to families. Nationally, 17% of grandparents responsible for grandchildren live below the poverty line, and middle-income kin caregivers find that expenses of caring for children wipe out their retirement savings. Most of our kinship caregivers have extremely limited incomes.

We are thankful for the investment made thus far to support kinship families. Unfortunately, the need statewide exceeds current resources, leaving many families and children struggling and at risk of placement instability and possible child welfare system involvement. Further investment at this time will enhance kinship family resilience and children's sense of permanency and belonging throughout our state. Please support HF 1661 for the wellbeing of kinship families. Please contact Erin Sutton, LSS' Senior Director of Advocacy, at erin.sutton@lssmn.org if we may provide further information on this deeply important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Kiesel".

Lisa Kiesel
LSS Program Director

¹ GrandFacts State Fact Sheets. (March 2021). www.grandfactsheets.org