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*Growing Families
Enriching Lives*

March 21, 2022

Re: HF 4217

Dear Chair Schultz and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of HF 4217 as the Executive Director of EVOLVE Adoption & Family Services. Our organization specializes in kinship foster care and sees firsthand the disproportionality of children of color overrepresented in the Minnesota child welfare system on a daily basis. Foster parents and kinship caregivers play a vital role in caring for children who are unable to remain at home. Children coming into care often experience significant trauma, not just in the reasons for removal, but by the removal itself – being separated from their parents, family, community and culture. We know that it is best for children to remain within their kin network and community whenever possible, and to maintain ties to their culture. These factors increase a child's resiliency and ability to cope, and are already in Minnesota statutes as some of the required factors to consider determining a child's best interests in out-of-home placements.

Despite the significant and known value of this, there is a lack of engagement and a serious shortage of foster and adoptive families who are reflective of the communities and culture of children in out-of-home care. HF 4217 provides much needed funding and is a critical investment in the important work of structuring a foster care system that more fully supports the identity, connection, and well-being of the children and families who are involved.

We greatly appreciate your consideration and support of this bill on behalf of Minnesota's children in care.

Sincerely,

Susannah Barnes, LSW, CSW
Executive Director

Dedicated to a world where everyone has nurturing, permanent, and supportive familial relationships.

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