



March 9, 2021

To: Members of the House Human Services Finance and Policy Committee

Re: House File 1420

Dear Chair Schultz and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support of House File 1420. Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSS) is a provider of essential services across all 87 counties with more than 2,500 employees and 10,000 volunteers serving 1 in 65 Minnesotans every year. This includes LSS' Kinship Family Support Services which offers vital resources and support to kinship caregivers – those caring for a relative's or friend's child. Annually, LSS supports 327 families through individualized case management services and connects with over 1,200 individuals through our Kinship Support Line – a warmline open Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. We offer additional evidence-informed interventions, including: kinship family education sessions, in person and online support groups, and an annual conference.

LSS strongly supports House File 1420 which will:

- **Create statewide contracts through Minnesota's Department of Human Services for community-based providers to deliver case management, licensing and family supports.** Minnesota is fortunate to have a network of providers who understand the challenges kinship families face. LSS supports funding to build on the collective community knowledge of organizations who can immediately enhance culturally grounded services and supports to this underrepresented population of caregivers.
- **Establish a 24/7 warmline to support formal and informal caregivers.** Connecting a child with a caregiver is complex and requires trained staff to address and mitigate the concerns a kinship caregiver may have when trusted with the unanticipated role of caring for a child. Warmline programs have been proven as a cost-effective and efficient resource to secure immediate supports for families seeking legal or medical resources, reassurance or referrals¹. 24/7 access is essential to adequately connect kinship caregivers to timely, accurate and meaningful resources and support.
- **Support community-based providers to engage and coordinate in-depth relative searches.** When children have experienced any form of trauma or crisis, their risk factors decrease when cared for by loving and supportive family members. Regardless of the formality of placement,

¹ Young, T. L., Williams, J., Nelson-Gardell, D., Edwards, S. L., & Thorington, V. A. (2016). Assessing the helpfulness of one parenting assistance helpline. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25(7), 2236-2245.



we must work to find ways to locate and provide individualized, culturally responsive outreach to kinship caregivers so that children remain connected to their families, communities and traditions.

LSS is currently receiving an increased number of requests from kinship caregivers who seek education, information and compassionate support. In Minnesota, there are over 29,000 children living with a relative or close friend.² Additional statistics indicate at least 20 times that many live in informal arrangements outside of child protective services, adoption or foster care systems.³ All kinship families require a variety of programmatic responses and adequate funding to uniquely support the children in their care. However, a majority of families are not recognized for their contributions to child welfare due to the lack of formal legal caregiving status. As kinship family caregiving spans cultural, racial and socioeconomic lines, it is time to properly invest in kinship caregiver services and supports. This will truly recognize the positive role kinship families play in fostering safe and healthy development of children, preserving cultural traditions and values, and increasing the protective factors they offer by caring for children experiencing trauma.⁴

We are thankful to Representative Hassan for her leadership on this bill and to AspireMN for advancing this important issue. If we can be of service of support on these issues, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or LSS' Senior Director of Advocacy, Erin Sutton, at erin.sutton@lssmn.org.

Sincerely,

Patrice O'Leary
Associate Vice President of Family Services
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

² National KIDS COUNT. (2018) 2009-2018 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC)

³ Generations United calculated this figure based on the following two data sources: Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center. 2014-2016 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC). | Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center. Child Trends analysis of data from Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) made available through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN).

⁴ Denby, R. W., Testa, M. F., Alford, K. A., Cross, C. L., & Brinson, J. A. (2017). Protective factors as mediators and moderators of risk effects on perceptions of child well-being in kinship care. *Child Welfare*, 95(4), 111-136.