



March 20, 2023

Chair Wiklund and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

On behalf of Ampersand Families, I am writing to express our support of SF 1638 and SF 1639 to support kinship caregivers and the Quality Parenting Initiative.

Ampersand Families is a non-profit organization whose mission is to “provide permanency and adoption services to older youth and families who face barriers to equity in child welfare, and champions systemic changes that advance belonging, dignity, and hope.”

A regular part of our work is taking calls from grandparents, aunts and uncles, adult siblings, and other relatives who are concerned that a child (or sibling group) they love has entered, or is at risk of entering, Minnesota’s foster care system.

Regardless of the circumstances that led to this family crisis, it is a painful and overwhelming time for relatives who want to help and it is a traumatic experience for children. We know that when possible, keeping children and relatives connected reduces this trauma and long term impacts on children.

When formal child welfare is necessary, kinship caregivers are required to complete an intensive foster care licensing process in addition to the day-to-day parenting they are providing for one or more relative children. They deserve easy access to foster care licensing agencies who have expertise and passion for supporting kinship caregivers. We believe the provisions of SF 1639 will help to fill the gaps in services available to kinship families as they navigate a challenging and incredibly important journey.

Minnesota has made great strides to ensure our child welfare practices are truly child and youth centered, and to focus on providing quality care to children whose lives have been impacted by system involvement. Still, we hear from foster youth and foster parents who didn’t have information about the youth’s most basic needs when they came to their home because there was no effort to connect the foster parent with the child’s birth parents, county workers whose caseloads and other dynamics led to them being hard to reach and generally out-of-touch with the youth’s needs and input, and many more which show need for continued improvements to our system. We see the provisions of SF 1638, to provide support to Quality Parenting Initiative Minnesota principles and practices, as a step in the right direction.

We appreciate your support of both SF 1638 and SF 1639 to better support foster youth, kinship care providers, and families across Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Christina Zeise, MPP, MSW
Executive Director

ampersand families provides permanency and adoption services to older youth and families who face barriers to equity in child welfare, and champions systemic changes that advance belonging, dignity and hope