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5/1/24

Senator Bobby Joe Champion
95 University Avenue W., Room 3401
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Ester Agbaje
437 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Sen. Champion and Rep. Agbaje,

Thank you for authoring HF912/SF716, the African American Family Preservation Act. This historic legislation is critical to addressing the deep and pervasive racial disparities in Minnesota's child protection system and we urge you to support it.

Our office has long been committed to addressing the racial disparities in our child protection system. At the legislature, we have previously been involved in drafting legislation to modernize and improve the foster care licensing system and to improve the Reestablishment of Parental Rights Act. We have also worked with our client, the Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department, to keep families together and uplift them with resources prior to removal of children from their parents' care. Nonetheless, unconscionable racial disparities persist in our child protection system, causing significant and disproportionate negative impact to African American families.

As we continue to prioritize system change to address these racial disparities, we recently helped to design and participate in a pilot program, in collaboration with Hennepin County Children and Family Services and Village Arms, that provided African American families with some of the protections of the African American Preservation Act. Data from this pilot demonstrated clear, positive effects in providing preventative, up-stream services to families prior to court-involved child protection cases. The lessons learned in the pilot program improved the performance of the child protection system as a whole, and we believe that the lessons learned will lead to a sustained impact of improving outcomes for all families.

For those reasons, we encourage legislators to support this important piece of legislation. Thank you again for authoring this bill and allowing me to express my support for reforms on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Moriarty
Hennepin County Attorney