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March 6, 2024

The Honorable Mary K. Kunesh
95 University Avenue West
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 3209
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Minnesota Indian Family Protection Act Revision

Dear Senator Kunesh:

I write on behalf of the Prairie Island Indian Community ("Community") in strong support of SF4480 and, in addition, to thank you for your leadership in strengthening and expanding the Minnesota Indian Family Protection Act ("MIFPA") as it undergoes extensive statewide revision in light of the challenges made to the Indian Child Welfare Act ("ICWA") in recent years.

SF4480 supports our effort to preserve our Dakota culture and support our children in embracing their Tribal identity as Native American children. As you know, for many years our voices were silenced, our history buried, and our language forgotten. Our ancestors survived the federal government's attempts to eliminate the Dakota people, language, and culture. The revision and expansion of MIFPA allows our children to be rightfully placed with their PIIC relatives, therefore furthering our ability to preserve and pass on our way of life to the next seven generations.

Many of us have family members who were removed and lost to the Community at large. The result hurts the child, the family, and the Community. We lose our most precious resource and our future – our children. Some of them find a way back to the Community, but many have not. However, when foster and/or adoption placements result in a child remaining within the Community in a healthy environment, these children are supported and allowed to maintain their connection. Connection to each other and all things is essential to what it means to be Dakota.

To expand and enhance MIFPA is to demonstrate the state's interest in supporting preservation of Tribal identity in Native American culture and children. It recognizes Tribes as the appropriate governments to provide direction to county social service agencies regarding the best interests of tribal children.

We thank you for the opportunity to share our history and perspective, and we encourage members to support efforts to strengthen and expand MIFPA.

Pidámaya (Thank you),

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Grant Johnson', is positioned above the printed name.

Grant Johnson
Tribal Council President