

Senator Melissa Wiklund
2107 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 7, 2024

Dear Senator Wiklund, Vice Chair Mann, Lead Utke and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the proposed Advisory Council on Child Protection (SF4761). We write as a coalition of frontline professionals with experience of caring for children who have been victims of abuse. We believe establishing an advisory council dedicated to reforming the child protection space will be critical to ensuring meaningful change.

We recognize that the most important consideration is that the advisory council be truly capable of addressing children's safety and best interests. We are mindful that the impetus for this advisory council was the horrific deaths of children that resulted from keeping them in dangerous and continuously harmful situations, often for years on end. Safe Passage's research has corroborated, and to some extent inspired, the case studies reflected in the recent Star Tribune investigative reporting series.

We have been in ongoing conversations with Senator Mitchell and are thankful for her partnership. We have a few suggestions for the bill as introduced and understand this is only the first Committee stop. We plan to continue dialogue with the author to ensure that the makeup of the Committee includes experts who work in child protection including a child abuse pediatrician and an early childhood expert. We also believe the Council could be improved by adding evaluation of whether Minnesota's two track system prioritizes child safety.

An advisory council will be an ongoing force for change in the system provided that the Legislative Task Force on Child Protection continues in operation and supports it, the Advisory Council has a clear and strong mandate, and the composition of the Council represents the interests of children and includes members who will challenge existing practices.

Thank you for considering our input into this important matter and the opportunity to share testimony with the Committee. We look forward to working with Senator Mitchell and the proposed Advisory Council to make meaningful changes to Minnesota's child protection landscape.

Signed ,

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