



Senator Melissa Wiklund, Chair  
Health and Human Services  
March 7, 2024

Chair Wiklund and Health and Human Services Committee Members,

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, MN Chapter (NASW-MN), we are writing to comment on SF4761, a bill that establishes a Child Protection Advisory Council.

NASW-MN is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in our state, representing about 2000 social workers. Our members work in a wide variety of settings, including direct practice (clinical and non-clinical) and macro practice. While the populations served by social workers vary greatly, many interact and are impacted by the child protection system.

We have long opposed the system of racialized and ableist surveillance, separation, and punishment and instead, advocate for trauma-responsive policies that foster participation, restoration, safety, and resilience. We believe that transforming current practices is necessary to prevent harm within families and recurrent trauma in foster care. We hope a Child Protection Advisory Council can address this complex system while holding and honoring multiple truths: our system provides an important safety net for vulnerable families in need of support while operating without sufficient resources; and yet, it disproportionately impacts families who do not identify as white while introducing unnecessary trauma into the lives of MN children.

We note that this bill includes goals of reviewing laws and enhancing accountability. We ask you to consider adding additional voices to this important conversation for a more complete review:

- A licensed social worker in good standing with the Board of Social Work with experience in the child protection system or a Board of Social Work representative.
- An attorney who represents parents, relatives, and kin in child protection hearings.
- A parent advocate.

Currently the county settings are exempted from Minnesota Statutes Chapter 148E that establishes social work practice. When social workers moved to a system of licensing accountability in 1987, a number of large workplace settings were exempted. Other exempted settings including the state and city have since been included in licensing. Since we know that the Board of Social Work hears from the public who are confused about social workers holding the title but not accountable to licensing regulations, we feel that this is one factor - of many - that needs attention. NASW-MN respects the work of county staff - with or without social work degrees, and we have no desire to disrupt fragile or understaffed workplace settings or replace others who can bring valuable experience or other training. Instead, we see a Child Protection Advisory Committee as an appropriate place to discuss the role of health licensing boards in spaces that employ social workers who work with vulnerable families in the spirit of greater transparency and accountability.

Along that theme, there are others, including the Institute to Transform Child Protection, that specialize in child protection legal proceedings. Their voice, along with the parent voice, is critical in designing a system that honors family systems.

We appreciate your service and work on this important issue. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
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Executive Director, NASW-MN

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