



Phone 651.439.2446
Fax 651.439.2071
E-mail Evolve@EvolveServices.org
Web EvolveServices.org

*Growing Families
Enriching Lives*

March 19, 2024

Re: African American Family Preservation Act - HF0912

Dear Chair Pinto and Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing in support of the African American Family Preservation Act (HF0912) as the Executive Director of EVOLVE Family Services. Our agency has been providing child-centered family services in Minnesota for over 46 years, and since 2016, has been a leader in providing Kinship Foster Care services for children and families involved in the child welfare system. Since 2016, we have served over 650 children in relative placements. Of the youth we are presently serving, 78% are children of color; 27% specifically identifying as Black, and 24% identifying as multiracial with a majority having Black heritage. While we are thankful these children are with relatives, the fact that there are so many children with African American heritage facing out-of-home care is extremely concerning.

In addition to our Kinship program, EVOLVE has operated UMOJA MN since 2015. Our Black Heritage Camps and support programs aim to connect African American children who are experiencing out-of-home care with their community and heritage to support the development of positive Black identity, while working to equip caregivers to meet their social, emotional and cultural needs. To date we have served over 1,500 children through this program. Many of these youth, from all over the state of Minnesota, have been placed into white, non-relative families. Our last Black Heritage Camp held in January 2024 had 266 registrants, with some families turned away for lack of space. While we feel it is vital to provide these important services, the simple fact that this program has such a high need to exist in our state indicates a very serious problem.

These appalling statistics against the backdrop of consistently high disproportionality and disparities for Black families in the Minnesota child welfare system are long overdue for meaningful legislative intervention. This overrepresentation underscores an even greater importance in keeping children within their family systems whenever safe and practically possible. The African American Family Preservation Act will work to protect the best interest of Black children and promote the security, stability, and well-being of African American children and families. Thank you for your prioritization and support of HF 0912.

Sincerely,

Susannah Barnes, LSW, CSW
Executive Director

Dedicated to a world where everyone has nurturing, permanent, and supportive familial relationships.

EVOLVE Family Services
5850 Omaha Avenue North
Stillwater MN 55082