

March 19, 2024

RE: HF 912 | African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act

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

The Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson (OOFY) has a statutorily required mandate to investigate decisions, acts, and other matters related to the health, safety, and welfare of youth in foster care to promote the highest attainable standards of competence, efficiency, and justice for youth who are in the care of the state. OOFY was created through legislation in the 2022 session based on advocacy and testimony by current and former Fosters. These Fosters were seeking a mechanism for more oversight and accountability, based on their experiences of abuse, neglect, discrimination or exploitation at the hands of our very own child protection systems. Our office is still in its infancy. We have a goal of opening the office in the next two months, to receive complaints, questions, and concerns from and on behalf of Fosters, and to seek appropriate resolution using a Credible Review Process.

OOFY supports the provisions of HF 912 and it's aims to better support family preservation and culturally centered case planning and services. Research, as well as collective stories from people with lived experience in foster care, tell us clearly that removal of children from their parent(s) is traumatic and has a lifelong impact, and that placement and ongoing connections with a child's family helps mitigate the trauma. HF 912 aims to require more creativity, more planning, more family and community involvement, and more intentionality before making such impactful decisions.

OOFY also supports the increased accountability measures included in HF 912 to ensure our child welfare system is on track to address the unacceptable disproportionality of African, African American, and other disproportionately over-represented communities. Data shows us that despite awareness of and attention to our state's disproportionality in child welfare, we have struggled to make meaningful progress, for years and decades. H.F. 912 provides our systems a roadmap for urgent and thoughtful action. It aligns with the priorities outlined in the One Minnesota Plan ([One Minnesota Plan / One Minnesota Plan \(mn.gov\)](#)): "In all of our work, we will seek to end discrimination and eliminate disparities for people of color and Indigenous community members, women, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, immigrants, and people in all zip codes and of all economic statuses."

HF 912 may seem overwhelming and will require significant financial investment that may understandably concern many lawmakers. As you consider this bill, "Do the right thing, even when it's difficult" is a relevant guiding principle of the One Minnesota Plan to consider. We thank the co-authors and community advocates of this important bill who continue to ask us to "do the right thing" to effectively address disproportionality in our complex child welfare system.

Sincerely,



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