



## UJIMA RENEWED, LLC

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### **Minnesota House and Senate Legislative Committees,**

I am reaching out to request your support of The Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act, authored by Senator Champion and Representative Agbaje.

I am a licensed therapist and have Black families involved in the CPS system. They are, unfortunately, experiencing the very hardships this act would prevent. I'd like to share Black family experiences:

- Reunification is being stalled for one family by sudden changes to requirements that are repetitive and delaying the process (multiple psychological evals, multiple observation sessions beyond what was required).
- Licensed physician evaluations for one family are being voided because Hennepin County required evaluations completed through county services after the client submitted the completed requirement twice from two different physicians.
- Visitation time is being reduced for one family because the family voluntarily engages in family therapy, and the CPS social worker is counting one hour per week in family therapy the same as a six hour visitation.
- A CPS social worker emailed the care team to let them know that submitting transportation requests in her system is too "difficult" and is now declining any changes in transportation for visitation and appointments.
- A CPS social worker emailed the care team to advise how "mentally ill" her client was and anything the client emails should be dismissed after the client emailed the care team and advised that the delays in unification and lack of communication about visitation changes was prompting her to review the grievance process.

- One family is now experiencing symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder through: hypervigilance, nightmares, irritability, constant worrying, angry outbursts, symptoms of sudden panic and separation anxiety because of reunification delays.
- One twelve year old child was boarded in hospital after his foster family called the police to have him removed because they needed his room for their nephew who was being released from juvenile detention the following week.
- One seven year old child was ordered to reunite with her biological father, who was proven in a prior CPS case to have significantly physically abused her, which required hospitalization, his parental rights were terminated, and now is required to have weekly visitation with him. She is now experiencing symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder through: hypervigilance, nightmares, symptoms of sudden panic and anxiety.

Child welfare disproportionality is a long standing, egregious and well-documented issue that continues to plague the state of Minnesota. Research shows us that children fare better both in the short and long term when left within their own families. We have an obligation to ensure a child's well-being by preserving their familial connections.

The MN African American Family Preservation Act would serve to:

- Requires active efforts to prevent child's out-of-home placement, eliminate need for child's removal from the home, and reunify child and family as soon as practicable.
- Requires active efforts to develop a safety plan to address child and family needs before local agency petitions court to remove a child.
- Requires that, if neglect is alleged, the safety plan incorporates economic services to prevent neglect.
- Requires active efforts to support noncustodial parents and relatives who want to care for a child.
- Places reasonable restrictions on termination of parental rights to mitigate biases that shape disparities.
- Amends statute to empower reestablishment of parental rights when it's in the child's best interest.
- Requires case reviews of disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare system.

- Requires local agencies take concrete steps to identify, address, and reduce factors that lead to disproportionality and disparities in child welfare outcomes.
- Establishes an African American Child Welfare Oversight Council to monitor the system and make recommendations for improving child welfare services for African American children.
- Establishes an African American Child Well-Being Unit that provides training and technical assistance to reduce child welfare disparities.
- Provides grants to support families and communities impacted by racial disparities in child welfare.
- Requires creation of online compliance & feedback portal to receive reports of noncompliance with the law.
- Appropriates funding to administer the law and establishes this funding as an ongoing appropriation.

Everyone has a stake in ensuring our child protection system is fair and equitable. Thank you in advance for your time, service and support of this bill.

Sincerely,



**Joanna Rosa, MS, LPCC, LADC**