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**Growing Families
Enriching Lives**

March 5, 2025

Re: SF1786 – Kinship Foster Care: Licensing and Support for Families

Dear Chair Wicklund and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

I am writing in support of SF1786 (Kinship Foster Care: Licensing and Support for Families) as the Executive Director of EVOLVE Family Services. Our agency has provided child-centered family services in Minnesota for over 47 years and is a recognized leader in Kinship Foster Care licensing and support. Since 2016, we have served over 670 children in relative placements. Approximately 78% of the children we are serving are children of color. This overrepresentation underscores an even great importance in keeping children within their family systems and culture, especially with the State's implementation of the African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act.

Kinship families need responsive care and specialized support. Foster care licensing involves significant paperwork, background checks, trainings, home preparation, and an invasive assessment process. There are lengthy procedures for requesting reconsideration around issues with the potential to disqualify them. Minnesota's current licensing process does not provide for any differences in licensing a grandparent versus a non-relative provider. Because this process is not specialized, we have found that supporting kinship families through the standard licensing process takes more than double the time of working with non-relative foster parents.

EVOLVE specifically supports the requirements for providing kinship caregivers with clear information and access to their full breadth of options for licensing and support, the development of condensed guidelines by the Commissioner for kinship-specific licensing, and providing official paperwork in their native language. EVOLVE also supports the investment of additional funds to ensure that kinship families have access to the full range of county and community-based organizations for licensing and support available to them. While EVOLVE supports eliminating duplicative or unnecessary aspects of licensing for kin/relative providers, EVOLVE is concerned about the significant decrease in timelines for assessment of child safety (1 month), given that the current timeline (4 months) is already difficult to achieve.

Sincerely,

Susannah Barnes, LSW, CSW
Executive Director

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