



March 4, 2025

**Re: SF1786 | Kinship Licensing and Support for Relative-Kin Caregivers**

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

The Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsman (OOFY) supports the changes proposed in SF1786 to improve licensing and provide stronger support to relative-kin caregivers.

OOFY was established in May 2024 through the advocacy of Minnesotans with experience in foster care. We are a fully independent state agency, separate from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, and Department of Human Services. OOFY hears concerns from anyone, prioritizing concerns from children and youth in foster care about their rights, care, safety, and placement. OOFY is the only state agency charged with hearing directly from foster youth. Four of our six staff have personal experience in foster care.

The experiences of foster youth in contact with OOFY align with national data, that placement with relatives is both strongly preferred and provides better outcomes, and that relatives should be provided support to help meet their needs. Relatives and kin can often provide stability and familiarity to ease difficult transitions. It is vitally important that these caregivers are supported in the complicated and time-intensive requirements of licensing and training, which are often not planned for, to ensure both the safety of foster youth and maintained connection to family and community.

These modifications ensures that Fosters have the opportunity to grow up in supportive, stable homes and maintain connections to their loved ones. Thank you for supporting this legislation and your continuing efforts to improve the experiences of Fosters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Misty Coonce".

Ombudsman for Foster Youth

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