

March 20, 2025

**RE: SF 1025 | Foster Youth Federal Benefits Trust Fund Accounts**

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

The Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson (OOFY) was established in 2022, following the advocacy efforts of many Fosters here in our state who called for greater oversight and support as they navigate their way through the foster care system. Our office officially opened in May 2024 to provide support and oversight to the 10,000 children and youth in foster care in Minnesota.

OOFY's mission is to listen, inform, take action, and make recommendations to improve the lives of all Minnesota foster youth, ensuring they receive the highest standard of care. We are encouraged to see that the critical issue of conserving federal benefits (SSI/RSDI) for foster youth continues to receive the attention it rightfully deserves from the legislature.

Over the past few years, our state has heard from a wide array of stakeholders, including from Fosters themselves, Foster serving organizations, and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Through these conversations, testimonies, and a comprehensive two-year study on the issue, a consistent theme was present: Fosters deserve to be notified about their eligibility for these funds, and to have them set aside in a trust fund.

The troubling outcomes for Fosters, such as high rates of homelessness, instability, and lack of normalcy often derive from lack of financial security. Setting aside these federal benefits would be an important first step in ensuring that Fosters are not deprived of what is rightfully theirs. When the state of Minnesota intervenes in a Foster's life, we have a responsibility to ensure that they receive the benefits they are legally and ethically entitled to.

We are hopeful that Minnesota will follow the growing national trend of remedying and addressing this harmful practice. Nationally, [31 states](#) have taken some form of action to address the adverse effects this practice causes. By remedying this practice, we can create lasting improvements in the lives of those we serve and ensure that Minnesota's most vulnerable children have the financial foundation they need to thrive as they transition into adulthood.

We believe that Fosters have a right to access their federal benefits and should be the sole beneficiary of these funds, especially given the known likelihood of placement and caregiver changes during their time in foster care. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Misty Conce*

Ombudsperson for Foster Youth

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