



March 18, 2025

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

I am writing to express my strong support for SF1547, which seeks to allocate critical funding to the Minnesota Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsman (OOFY) for the addition of full-time employees dedicated to outreach efforts for foster youth.

Quality Parenting Initiative-Minnesota (QPI-MN) emphasizes loving parenting as the shared goal for all children in foster care. We achieve this by empowering those with lived experience to lead, fostering meaningful relationships, and delivering research-informed services. Adequately resourcing OOFY will directly support these goals by enabling outreach that centers on the voices of foster youth, ensuring their needs are not only heard but addressed with compassion and understanding.

Foster youth and families with lived experience in the system are best positioned to inform meaningful change. By providing training led by system-involved individuals, QPI and the OOFY work collaboratively to strengthen relationships between parents, caregivers, and stakeholders. Additional staff would expand OOFY's ability to elevate these voices and offer support where it is most needed.

The foster care system profoundly shapes the lives of young people in our state. A well-resourced OOFY ensures these individuals have a dedicated advocate to navigate challenges, amplify their voices, and advocate for their well-being. In turn, this promotes stronger outcomes in child development, community connection, and long-term success for those impacted by the system.

QPI's approach underscores the power of relationships and the wisdom drawn from lived experiences. By fostering collaboration across child welfare stakeholders—including county agencies, foster care licensing organizations, and community partners—we create a cohesive and child-centered system. This funding request aligns with our collective responsibility to ensure the foster care system reflects Minnesota's values of equity, care, and opportunity for all children.

I urge you to support SF1547 with this essential legislation and to help ensure that Minnesota's foster youth receive the advocacy and resources they deserve through a fully empowered OOFY. Thank you for your commitment to our youth and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Rickord, MA, LP, SEP". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Kate" and "Rickord" being the most prominent parts.

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