

March 20, 2025

Chair Senator Melissa H. Wicklund
Minnesota Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Room 1100
Minnesota Senate Building

RE: Support of SF 1548

Dear Chair Wicklund and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

I am a child welfare professional, and I write today in support of SF 1548. Both my employer and Minnesota Social Service Association, of which I am a member, have also submitted letters of support for this bill. We are all committed to making sure every child grows up in a loving and stable home, and SF 1548 would help ensure that.

This bill is about keeping our promise to children in foster care who we said we'd take care of. If passed, it will ensure that the youngest children in care receive the support they need to thrive after they find permanent homes. Currently, when children age 6 and older finalize an adoption or transfer of custody, they continue to receive the same level of financial support they had while in foster care. But for children under age 6, those benefits are cut in half.

This current system doesn't make sense—the cost of raising a child isn't cut in half just because they're younger when they find permanency. In fact, children often need *more* resources, support, and care in the early development years. Costs add up for things like childcare and supportive services to help children heal from the adversity they've experienced. Childcare can be especially financially challenging because many children have complex needs that require more specialized, and therefore more expensive, care.

I've heard from many caregivers who may not have planned to raise a child, but they want to provide a safe, stable home for their young relatives. They want to keep siblings together and keep their children out of non-relative homes. But many find themselves facing financial hardship to do so.

Amidst all the paperwork, training, meetings, court hearings, and daily whirlwind of caring for children who have experienced trauma - some caregivers don't realize their child's benefits will be reduced by half (or even more) after finalization. Caregivers are caught off guard and suddenly lacking the support they'd planned for. One told me, "They said I would get financial help. I don't know if I would have adopted my child if I'd known the support would be less. I love them and want to help but I just can't afford it." No one wants to say or hear that, but it's the reality we need to acknowledge. Without proper financial support, families may be forced to see children re-enter the foster care system.

In other situations, a child's team delays finalization until a child turns 6 to ensure they receive full benefits. But this keeps kids in foster care longer, disrupting stability and on the system side, adding to already full caseloads.

Again, this bill is a way to uphold our promise to take care of children in foster care. By ensuring equal financial support—regardless of age—we can help more children find stable, loving homes, without making it harder for the loved ones who step up to care for them. **With financial support, children can maintain family and community connections and have a more integrated sense of who they are, helping them thrive in childhood and beyond. It is imperative that we support these caregivers so we can help families stay together and avoid further disruption for children.**

I urge you to support SF1548 and help give Minnesota's children the care they deserve. Thank you for your time and commitment to the wellbeing of children and families in our state.

With gratitude,

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