



March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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

As an organization committed to the well-being and empowerment of families for fifty years, Families Rising is writing to express our strong support for SF 1548 and to urge your favorable consideration of this important legislation.

I have worked for Families Rising for over 27 years, during all that time supporting or running our Adoption Subsidy Resource Center. This program tracks adoption assistance programs throughout the US and Canada.

Minnesota operated a Title IV-E waiver from October 2005 through September 2010 to look at a new way to support families who adopted Minnesota's children. Before the evaluation was complete, DHS was already making recommendations to equalize the rates in the 2009 legislative session. Unfortunately that didn't happen in 2009 nor 2011, it took until 2013 for Northstar Care for Children to begin implementation in 2015. At the time of passage the adoption assistance rate was roughly less than 40% of the foster care rate for the same child.

When Northstar Care for Children was created it created a new system of inequity for children who obtain permanency before their 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. In some respects, the system is more unfair for children who obtain permanency before their 6<sup>th</sup> birthday as the level of financial support is relatively similar to the legacy adoption assistance program, but no longer comes with separate reimbursements for child care, respite care, or funding for specialized camps that had been available to those children under the legacy program.

Our understanding is that the cost of fully equalizing all three programs for all ages would be too costly. The statistics showed that younger children often were adopted more readily than older children, and so the financial disincentive that had existed wouldn't impact the adoption of younger children. Many advocates, myself included, believe part of the reason for this is that young children often aren't diagnosed until they are school age as doctors can be reluctant to label a child until they are a bit older and the diagnosis becomes clearer. The Federal government's Child Welfare Outcomes show that from 2016-2020 that about 82% of children who exited state care to permanency (reunification, adoption, or guardianship) had a diagnosed disability<sup>1</sup>.

Minnesota has made great progress with Northstar Care for Children, but with this bill they can get even closer to full equality. According to 2010 AFCARS data, the demographic data was children in MN were adopted by unrelated adults 58.1%, by unrelated foster parents 9.1%, and relatives 31.2%. While at the time, the respective national averages were 15%, 53%, and 32%. For 2022 the respective percentages in Minnesota are 13%, 29%, and 57%.

While we think that Minnesota should fully fund the Northstar Care for Children program by eliminating the Alternate Rate that limits payment to 50% of the foster care rate for all children, we understand that at 10 years of the program, an incremental improvement, especially with the higher number of children being adopted by relatives and those moving to guardianship, that this will help many Minnesota children and families who give them that much needed permanency. No child who has been the legal responsibility of the state of Minnesota should have the amount of support available to them limited solely by the age at which they find permanency with a family that the state approves of. The whole purpose of the Northstar Care for Children program was to align the rate available to children in foster care or those who have been adopted or entered into subsidized guardianship.

We urge you to give careful consideration to this critical legislation and stand in solidarity with Families Rising in fully supporting the well-being of all Minnesota children who obtain permanency regardless of their age.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We encourage you to support the passage of Senate File 1548 and thank Senator Kunesh for her work on this.

Sincerely,

Josh Kroll  
Program Manager of the Adoption Subsidy Resource Center  
Families Rising

<sup>1</sup>Child Welfare Outcomes 2020, Table III-7, p. 40,  
<https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cwo-report-to-congress-2020.pdf>