



MINNEAPOLIS AMERICAN INDIAN CENTER

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February 25, 2025

Re: Support for SF1548/HF1276

Dear Legislators:

I am writing in support of the modification to Northstar Care for Children for foster children under the age of 6 who reach permanency with relatives or within the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA) placement preferences.

The Minneapolis American Indian Center Family Services Programs, including our Tribal Liaison staff have worked with many families who have been at the point of accepting a transfer of legal custody and had concern that they would not be able to afford caring for young children in there care permanently without financial support .

Northstar Kinship Assistance and Adoption Assistance are financial benefits for children whose custody has been transferred to a relative/kin and children who are adopted. Northstar improves permanency for children by increasing the number of children who transition from foster care into a permanent family and provides ongoing benefits to children based on the level of care needed to support the child's needs and strengths.

However, children who reach permanency while under age 6 receive the Pre-School Entry Alternate Rate, which is approximately half the financial benefits that children over age 6 receive. While this increases as the child ages, it is always 50% of the basic rate. This negatively affects children under the age of 6 since their caregivers may not have the financial support to care for the children long-term.

Younger children are disproportionately represented in the foster care system; in 2023 approximately 22% of children in foster care in Minnesota were under 3 years old (DHS-4760-ENG 05-24: *Foster care: Temporary out-of-home care for children*). In some of these cases, county agencies may request to delay finalizing permanency until after the child turns 6 so the new custodians/adoptive parents and child receive the full Northstar funds. This requires families to interact with the child protection system longer than necessary and takes resources and direct support away from other families in the child protection system.

This modification to Northstar Care for Children ensures that foster children can grow up in supportive, stable homes with relatives. It also allows county agency resources and direct service efforts to be redirected to families who need direct support. Thank you for your continuing efforts to improve the experiences of children in the child welfare system.

Sincerely,

Many Lathende
Executive Director