

February 24, 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.

Northstar Kinship Assistance and Adoption Assistance is a valuable resource for families caring for young children. One significant concern for relatives who gain custody or adopt a child is childcare assistance. Our agency has received inquiries and complaints from relatives regarding the differences in childcare assistance after obtaining permanency. This discrepancy has confused the relatives and, more importantly, can disrupt the child's childcare arrangements due to changes in assistance rates. The proposed changes to legislation aim to provide stability and continuity in the child's early learning experience and will better prepare them for a successful lifelong learning journey

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,

Ann Hill  
Ombudsperson for African American Families  
Muriel Gubasta, J.D.  
Ombudsperson for Spanish-Speaking Families  
Office of Ombudsperson for Families  
1450 Energy Park Drive  
Suite 106  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
651-603-0058