

Chair Melissa Wiklund
Members of the Health and Human Services Committee
Minnesota Senate

March 19^h, 2025

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

We write today in support of bill SF1898.

Minnesota is a state supervised and country administered system that includes 11 sovereign tribal nations and 87 counties. The funding mechanisms and frameworks that allow child welfare funding to flow from the federal government to the state and then to counties and tribes are complex. There are areas where Minnesota may not be capturing funds available or sharing and disbursing them in equitable ways across the state. Also, there are ways Minnesota could build capacity and knowledge to better invest in preventative services to help children.

This bill provides a road map for MN to first get a baseline analysis of our funding mechanisms (including the critical question about the amount of increased state funding needed to truly support a high-quality system). It will also provide a second tier or scaffolding in the form of a practice model and program recommendations to ensure that we are spending money in a way that supports preventative services to help families and communities before they enter the child welfare system. Other states have utilized this type of strategy and have seen very positive results both in increased funding opportunities – but also more effective and equitable practices.

There have been robust engagement efforts with many stakeholders ahead of this bill being introduced. This includes direct engagement and collaboration with Leech Lake, and other tribal partners, the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA), Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), The Minnesota Department of Human Services, community advocacy groups, the Office of the Ombudsman for Foster Youth, and direct service providers who treat our families in the community. The timing of this bill and effort are especially critical as the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families is just being launched. The bill requires consultation with tribes and gives tribes an option about whether or not to participate. Additionally, the bill includes tribal participation in the decision about who to elect as the external consultant.

This is an opportunity that Minnesota should lean into – as a way to ensure that not only are we accessing all available federal and state funds but also to reassure the public and those impacted by child welfare that we are doing all we can to invest in an effective and culturally appropriate prevention service array. The return on investment in this approach has great potential.

This bill is not just about the money – at its core it is a commitment to the thousands of children and families caught up in our child welfare system that we are doing everything we can to ensure all families have access to the services and support they may need no matter what part of the state they live in.

For these reasons, we ask you to join us in supporting SF1898 to help improve the child welfare system for children and families across Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Joanna Woolman, Keeping Families Connected Minnesota

Kirsten Anderson on behalf of Aspire, MN

Suzanne Arntson, MSW, Deputy Director, on behalf of Scott County Health & Human Services

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council

Rena Moran, Ramsey County Board of Commissioners

Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson Misty Coonce

Ann Hill, Office of Ombudsperson for Families

Dr. Traci LaLiberte, on behalf of the Multidisciplinary Institute for Child Welfare

Sheri Riemers, Executive Director, Ain Dah Yung (Our Home) Center

Muriel Gubasta, Office of Ombudsperson for Families

Ligia Cushman, CEO, Families Rising

Lainie Janke, Executive Director, Therapeutic Services Agency

Richard Gehrman, former Executive Director Safe Passage for Children

Mary Lennick, Executive Director of Family Alternatives

Christina Zeise, Executive Director Ampersand for Families