

March 19, 2025

TO: Chair Wiklund, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee
RE: Office of Ombudsperson for Families Support of SF1898 -Child Welfare Fiscal Analysis, Program and Practice Evaluation, and Recommendations

Dear Chair Wiklund and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

The Ombudspersons of the Office of Ombudsperson for Families are writing to you to express strong support for **SF1898 (Kunesh)**, that directs the Commissioner of the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to hire third party, external entities to conduct a fiscal analysis of Minnesota's child welfare system, and evaluation of Minnesota child welfare programs and practice, as well as to provide recommendations based upon the results of these activities to the legislature.

Funding for child welfare programs and services in Minnesota is complex, with funding streams from local, state and federal sources intermixed and difficult to accurately forecast, fund and claim across the variety of funding sources. Yet, appropriate levels of funding to support the activities and services provided by local child welfare agencies that administer Minnesota's child welfare programs, and DCYF as the agency responsible for oversight and compliance with state and federal child welfare laws and funding requirements, is key to supporting vulnerable children and families in our state. It is only through a robust child welfare system, including prevention services, independent legal representation for children and parents, foster care, and permanency supports for adoptive and kinship families that Minnesota can confidently provide child welfare services to children and families. Without sufficient levels of funding across the areas mentioned above, our state will fail our most vulnerable residents: at-risk children and the families that care for them.

An assessment of current child welfare funding in Minnesota will provide a comprehensive accounting of the various local, state and federal funding streams applicable to child welfare, and provide insight and recommendations to ensure that Minnesota is best utilizing all funding available to support child welfare. An evaluation of child welfare programs and practice will shed light on the efficacy of child welfare practice and programs across the spectrum of services provided and recommend ways to improve these services. Both activities will highlight the needs of Minnesota's child welfare system and position local agencies and DCYF to better serve children and families in the child welfare system.

It is also the hope of this office that the analysis and evaluation required by this bill will shed light on the root causes of the continued disparate treatment of African American, Spanish Speaking, and Asian Pacific children and families, as well as other communities disproportionately represented within the child welfare system in Minnesota. We believe that appropriate levels of funding, accountable programs and practices, and an overall healthy and robust child welfare system is key to ending the unequal treatment of many children and families throughout the state.

As this committee reviews and contemplates this bill, the Office of Ombudsman for Families encourages you to consider the long-standing need to properly fund our state's child welfare system and the ongoing necessity of bringing an end to the disparate treatment of those overrepresented in the system. We respectfully ask that you support SF1898 and include it in the Health and Human Services Committee's omnibus bill.

Sincerely,
Muriel Gubasta, Ombudsman for Spanish Speaking Families
Ann Hill, Ombudsman for African American Families
Manuel Zuniga, Ombudsman for Asian Pacific Families