

**Chair Pinto, Chair Mitchell, and
Members of the Legislative Task
Force on Child Protection**

Minnesota Senate Building, Room 1100
95 University Ave. W
Saint Paul, MN 55103

January 9, 2024

Dear Chair Pinto, Chair Mitchell and Task Force Members:

We appreciate your work toward improving the child protection system and your requests for suggestions for change. We write as a coalition of professionals who have frontline experience with children who have been victims of abuse: child abuse pediatricians, child protection workers, judges, county sheriffs, mental health practitioners, and other Minnesotans dedicated to protecting Minnesota's children. We appreciate your dedication to this important work and look forward to continuing to monitor the work of the Task Force and engage with Task Force Members.

Our stakeholder group has been meeting to discuss the work of the Task Force. During our meetings we put together a few suggestions, listed below, that will improve the child protection system and ensure additional safeguards are put into place to protect Minnesota's children.

- Separate track assignment from the screening process. The decision for a child to be placed in Family Assessment (FA) vs Investigation should be made after obtaining further information and making a safety assessment.
- Create statewide standards for each step in the child protection process rather than relying on individual county practices. One example would be, as recommended by the Governor's Task Force on Child Protection, to "interview children individually first and prior to contact with the parent/legal guardian whenever possible." This will ensure that children and their families receive the same standard of treatment regardless of the county they live in.
- Re-evaluate Screening Guidelines for children being assigned to FA. Currently 65% of children are assigned to FA. Many of the children who have died in Minnesota had a history of assignment to FA. We believe there should be stricter criteria so that only low-risk cases are assigned to FA.
- Increase availability of chemical dependency and mental health resources for families assigned to these treatments as part of their case plans.
- Modernize the Social Services Information System (SSIS) so that more caseworkers' time is spent face to face with families rather than at the computer.
- Pursue the advisability of a state-run, rather than a county-run, system using an out-state consultant.
- Increase transparency of mortality data and the results of the Collaborative Safety Initiative so that this information can be used to improve the safety of children going forward.
- Create a county survey to assess current caseloads and compliance with practices previously recommended, such as the use of multidisciplinary teams and 24/7 availability.

Our group will continue to meet to discuss and expand upon the items listed above. We believe the suggestions above would be solutions that could help to improve the child protection system for the children and families within the system, and the individuals who interface with those families. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you in 2024, serve as a resource, and answer questions at any time. You can contact us through Lisa Hollensteiner at lmhollensteiner@gmail.com

Respectfully,

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Retired Chief Justice MN Supreme Court

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**** Member of 2014-2015 Governor's
Task Force on the Protection of Children**