



**An association of resources and advocacy for children, youth and families**  
[www.aspiremn.org](http://www.aspiremn.org)

**AspireMN Point of View – Advancing Child Protection Goals for  
Children and Families in Minnesota**  
Fall 2023

Reports from the Office of Legislative Auditor and the media have focused attention and concern on the state of the child protection and wider child welfare system in the state of Minnesota. As community-based providers of foster care and wider prevention and early intervention services for children and families, AspireMN leaders have unique perspective on the current challenges and opportunities for children and families and the wider child welfare system. The following reflections are in response to the invitation from state leaders for recommendations on how to fix current systems, grounded in the Quality Parenting Initiative-MN values of: lived experience leadership, excellent parenting and meaningful relationships, and research informed policy and practice.

**Start with best practice**

*Safety is found in relationship* – building relationships with the child, family and foster parent supports are critically important to assure coordinated care that is responsive to meet the needs of the caregivers, in supporting reunification and wellbeing for the child(ren) while in care.

*Kinship caregivers require enhanced supports* – caregivers who had no ability to plan for the arrival of their kin children are under a number of new stressors to provide food, furniture and care for children newly in their homes, to find child care, transportation and to get licensed in foster care. Actively supporting kinship caregivers assures wellbeing for children and prevents unnecessary trauma of additional removals and transitions.

*Best interest of the child is often known by the child* – children who are able to communicate their preferences must be asked about potential kinship caregivers, they know where they are comfortable, experience acceptance and feel loved. Children and those they name as their allies are able to identify the caregivers, services, and community supports that are most meaningful for their lives.

*Children and families are complex and require nuanced approaches* – individualized care is fundamental to safety and positive permanency for children and families. Mandates, policy goals and timelines are important to observe – and should not be implemented without concern for each individual child. Prioritizing an individualized

**AspireMN improves the lives of children, youth and families served by member organizations through support for quality service delivery, leadership development and policy advocacy.**

response over a uniform set of goals can support the wellbeing and safety that we want all children and families to experience.

Quality Parenting Initiative-MN provides a practice framework that grounds all involved in our system with the values that should drive decisions about care plans and the system reforms that can most benefit children and families.

### **High level recommendations to support foster care**

- Advance kin licensing requirements as allowed by new federal language to create an easier pathway for kin to be licensed in foster care
- Support kinship caregivers by funding community-based and county-based licensing and family care structures, outlined in SF [1639](#)/HF1661
- Invest in recruitment of quality, culturally responsive foster families through community-based foster care organizations
- Build culturally responsive service models to support intensive family needs, with support for wraparound care and intensive models including whole family foster care
- Include natural supports as fundamental to planning for families with emphasis on extended kin networks to include in team meetings and identify as assets for the family
- When a child or youth in foster care requires additional mental health or related supports (peers, etc), prioritize the needs of the child and family by supporting them to access needed care: with the point of view that mental health care is health care
- Assure kinship caregivers are able to choose their licensing support, including where available community-based foster care providers
- Rate setting ~ require a rate review for community-based foster care organizations to have reimbursement set based on a consistent a market rate standard
- Increase transparency for caregivers and all supporting family members by supporting standardized practices across counties

### **Opportunities for the Legislature**

- Increase access to community-based mental health care and associated early intervention supports by increasing outpatient Medicaid mental health rates
- Data is valuable: implement the recommendation to establish a statewide child protection intake line, with the goal of consistent response, data collection, need and trend learning that can occur with a centralized service. A goal would be to include multidisciplinary investigative teams where appropriate and possible.
- Support family preservation/early intervention services with investments from the MN State General Fund