



Association of
Minnesota Counties



Minnesota Association of County
Social Service Administrators

June 28, 2016

The Honorable Al Franken
United States Senate
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-2304

RE: Concerns with the Family First Prevention Services Act

Dear Sen. Franken:

The Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) would like to address significant concerns counties across Minnesota have with language included in the Families First Prevention Services Act. As written, this bill will place substantial restrictions on the use of federal funding for congregate care placements.

In response to increased attention on the child protection system, the last two years have shown a significant increase in the number of child protection reports to counties throughout our state. Changes in Minnesota statute, resulting from the work of the Governor's Task Force on Child Protection, have resulted in greater number of children in out-of-home placements. These measures have been taken to ensure the safety of Minnesota's most vulnerable children. However, as counties are seeing a growing need for out-of-home placements, there are decreasing family foster care placement options. Moreover, as counties are working to address these items with legislation at the state level, we are concerned restrictions on federal funding for congregate care placements would further reduce placement options. Now is not the time to limit the options available. Should this legislation pass as is, counties across Minnesota would be responsible for the costs associated with the loss of federal funding, putting an increased burden onto the property tax levy.

We appreciate and value investing in preventive care. Counties recognize that once safety concerns have been addressed, the best outcomes for children occur when they are reunited with their family. We recognize this legislation offers the important possibility of allowing funds to provide vital mental health, substance use and in-home services that could help children stay with their own families. Current funding for this important part of a continuum of needed services is lacking and we know we must address these areas if we are to strengthen the well-being and outcomes for children and families that come to the child welfare and child protection systems.

However, we need comprehensive investment. We cannot simply reallocate funds from out-of-home placement interventions into prevention. We need legislation that provides for a full continuum of care that addresses the needs of children throughout the child protection system ensuring their health, safety and well-being.

This legislation also provides an important reauthorization of the two Title IV-B programs including an extension of the adoption-kinship incentives, court improvement funds, workforce development funds tied to caseworker visits, and the regional partnership grants. The bill includes some needed improvements to the Chaffee program in regard to the age of eligibility. We support these items and recognize the need for these important provisions to move forward.

We hope that Congress, will address these concerns, while continuing the important work that is included in this bill. Congress must go beyond simply reallocating current child welfare funds and instead invest in every part of the system that is needed and proven effective.

Sincerely,



Jack Swanson, Roseau County Commissioner
President, Association of Minnesota Counties



Phil Claussen, Blue Earth County Human Services Director
President, Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators