

From Termination to A Father's Purpose

My name is Curtis Jackson Sr, a person in long-term recovery for almost seven years.
I am an enrolled member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.
I am a father to 5 beautiful children ages 23, 12, 8, 5, and 1.
I am writing to support the Minnesota State Legislature strengthening the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act. (HF 1071 and SF 667).

One of the greatest tragedies in life is to believe we don't have a purpose! From a young age, I knew my purpose was to be a father. As an American Indian father fighting for an opportunity to be a custodial parent, I did not have the knowledge to advocate for myself and my children effectively. With the assistance of the Ombudsperson for American Indian Families, I was provided with the resources and information to advocate for my purpose adequately. I met Mrs. Jill Esch in 2017, and I was very frustrated with Itasca County and the social workers involved in my CPS case. TERMINATION was all I heard from the moment I started my journey on February 26th, 2016. I was working on my case plan diligently and attending all my court appearances faithfully, to no avail. The Guardian Ad Litem did not believe I could care for my children for more than 3 hours and believed the out-of-home, off-the-reservation placement was the best option. I feel they were ignorant and naive to the idea of my children being raised by a man who struggled with substance use disorder and mental health. MIFPA and ICWA provided me with the guidelines to bring to the surface numerous violations and proved they were not following active efforts. On July 28th, 2017, my babies and I were reunited, and I was awarded full physical and full legal custody in December 2017 and January 2018.

I feel it would be very traumatic for future fathers not to have this ruling to protect the future of their families. Fathers are rarely given a chance to be custodial parents; however, ICWA and MIFPA do not discriminate against fathers. With mental health issues and substance use disorders plaguing our tribal members, it is vital to the preservation of the American Indian Families to have these monumental safeguards in place.

Please vote to strengthen MIFPA.

Respectfully,
Curtis Jackson Sr.
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