

Testimony RE: HF #1273

Hello:

My name is John Poupart. I am the former Ombudsman for Corrections (1983-1991). I am pleased to testify in support of HF 1273, in support of the Ombudsperson for American Indian Families.

I testified when the enabling legislation was first created for the Office of Ombudsperson for Families and have long been a supporter of this statute. However, as I observed the operations of this office and the other three Ombudspersons over the years, I became concerned that the Ombudsperson for American Indian Families was not achieving its full potential. This was due to internal conflict with other Ombudspersons operating out of the same office who had different legal and political definitions of the work they were obligated to perform.

American Indian children and families possess a distinct legal/political, cultural, and historical posture; unlike any other ethnic group in Minnesota, or America for that matter. As such, the state and federal laws as applied to American Indians are unique and are much different in their application. Moreover, American Indians in Minnesota are not grouped together in a single location but are scattered throughout the state on reservations and many different urban locations. None of the other Ombudspersons operate under similar circumstances. For these reasons, the Ombudsperson for American Indian Families should be considered to be a distinct and separate operation. Further, the weight of their caseload, necessary personnel, travel and other expenses should be considered as well.

I believe that the prospective legislation proposes a manner in which the office might better perform its responsibilities. I have attended the Joint Board meetings of the Office of Ombudsperson for Families over the years and at times, not all Ombudspersons were present. Some of those meetings were filled with tension; much to the point where I stopped attending because I felt unwelcome.

The proposed legislation is to the point and clearly identifies a distinct manner in which the high rate of disparities of out-of-home placements of American Indian children can be reduced in Minnesota. For many of my 81 years, I have been an advocate for American Indian issues and I proudly stand in support of HF 1273.

Respectfully,

John Poupart 3-8-21