

March 14, 2023

Dear Chair Moller and Members of the House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee:

We represent a broad array of organizations working to help youth throughout our state who currently work closely with the Department of Public Safety either through their grant process or through collaborating with young people who are connected with the justice system.

We are excited to support and welcome a cabinet-level Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) that will better ensure the government works better for the youth and families we serve. This department could embrace more developmentally appropriate strategies and ensure programs and services are no longer fragmented. The DCYF will reimagine how various programs spread throughout multiple agencies can better work together and streamline decision-making power to a single, accountable commissioner.

We are especially excited about an agency that can better develop and track outcomes for youth so we can work on closing so many of the equity gaps we know are exacerbated during the youth and young adult years. Young people are rarely engaged in just one system and while we appreciate compliance data, we look to a department that can provide well-being data. Without a dedicated cabinet level-agency and commissioner directly overseeing these programs, disparities will continue to increase and we will still be unable to answer the fundamental question, “How are the young people?”.

We are excited Juvenile Justice Programs and Youth Interventions Grants are included, yet we will still advocate for inclusion of Juvenile Corrections in this new department. There is a particular need for developmentally appropriate and accountable practices for young people. As you all are keenly aware, youth justice was created on the pillars of rehabilitation, restitution, and reconnection. Keeping both Justice Programs and Corrections together under that banner, as it is done in other states with similar Departments, will help ensure that we are keeping loving accountability rather than harmful punishment.

Many other states have already taken this approach to governance and with a significant state surplus, the time for this change is now.

Sincerely,

**The Legal Rights Center
Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Youthprise**

Dr. Kara Beckman
Researcher, University of Minnesota Healthy
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Dr. Raj Sethuraju
Minneapolis NAACP Criminal Justice Chair