

February 16, 2021
Re: Supporting HB 2505

Chair Williams, Vice Chair Leif, Vice Chair Ruiz, and Members of the Committee,

New Avenues for Youth's mission is to work in partnership with our community to prevent youth homelessness and provide young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with the resources and skills needed to lead healthy, productive lives. Since our inception, we have worked closely with the Department of Human Services (DHS) toward these goals. New Avenues is currently the largest provider of Foster Care "Independent Living Program" services in the State. In addition, we provide foster youth transitional housing services, operate Commercially Sexually Exploited Children intervention services, and operate Robinswood, an acute care Behavior Rehabilitation Services (BRS) shelter.

It is because of our long partnership with DHS, and our unique experiences working within Child Welfare, that we support HB 2505. It is clear from our experience that without active anti-racist, equity focused practice changes, historical oppression in Child Welfare (and all systems), which result in disproportionality and overrepresentation, will continue to harm BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and other often marginalized children and families. HB 2505 is focused on prevention of removal and equitable treatment of families involved with DHS by reducing bias from Child Welfare decisions. Further, the proposed Child Welfare Equity Committee will review the processes used when making case decisions and recommend actions that remove systems of oppression from all steps of the Child Welfare process.

HB 2505 will provide foster youth, individuals, and families impacted by Child Welfare decisions with fair and equitable treatment and access to services by removing implicit and explicit bias in the Child Welfare system. HB 2505 reflects the changes families most impacted by Child Welfare need and deserve.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sean Suib, MSW
Executive Director
New Avenues for Youth