



March 13, 2024

Senate Housing Finance and Policy Committee

SUBJECT: Letter of Support for HF1566 - Housing protections for autistic children

Dear Chair Igo Chair Howard, and Committee Members,

The Multicultural Autism Action Network is a non-profit organization serving families of children with disabilities in multicultural communities in Minnesota.

We are writing to express our support of HF1566 which underlines the importance of housing accommodations for people with disabilities, especially in rental situations. In the past few years, several autistic children have drowned following elopement from their homes. Layers of protection are needed to ensure this never happens again, and one of those layers is for renters to understand their rights to reasonable accommodations such as door locks, window alarms, protected entrances, and fencing in rental housing.

The families we serve are often unaware that they have the right to request these reasonable accommodations. This bill seeks to clarify the right to make these potentially lifesaving requests and addresses the fear of retaliation. The stigma around disclosure of disability also creates obstacles to keeping children safe.

This bill addresses the need for families to be able to request reasonable accommodation and modifications and underlines a landlord's obligation to make changes needed for people with disabilities to live safely in their communities.

We respectfully ask for your support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Multicultural Autism Action Network

Fatima Molas
Delia Samuel
Rufo Jiru
Maren Christenson Hofer

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Farhia Said, and I am to express my strong support for HF 1566 by Rep Samakab Hussein. This would provide critical protections for families like mine who have children with autism. As a renter and a parent of autistic children, I have firsthand experience with the challenges of ensuring their safety in a rental home challenges that are often met with resistance from landlords.

One of the most distressing realities I face is that my children elope. They wander, often without warning, and without understanding the dangers around them. There have been multiple instances where my children have walked out of the door, and we have found them outside, sometimes near hazardous areas. The fear of losing my child to a body of water, a busy street, or another unsafe situation is something I live with every day.

As a renter, trying to work with landlords to install simple safety measures such as secure locks or alarms has been frustrating and, at times, impossible. Some landlords have outright refused, while others have given me warnings for requesting modifications. In my current home, I have installed locks that I know are necessary for my children's safety, but they are not approved by my landlord. As a result, I have been written up, leaving me constantly worried about my housing stability. No parent should have to choose between keeping their child safe and maintaining a place to live.

This bill would ensure that families with autistic children have the right to request reasonable accommodations to protect their children from harm, especially when living near bodies of water or other attractive nuisances. It would also protect tenants from retaliation when making these necessary requests. These are not extravagant modifications we are asking for basic, life-saving measures to prevent tragedies.

I urge you to support HF1566 because no family should have to live in fear of losing their home simply for trying to keep their children safe. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Farhia Said

Advocate

Neurodivergent Parent

Maangaar Voices

Subject: Urgent Support for MN HF1566 – Protecting Children with Autism in Rental Housing

Dear Elected Officials.

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Fay Jede, and I am the mother of Waey's Ali Mohamed, an autistic child who tragically died on June 10, 2024, after eloping from our apartment in Hopkins, MN. I am writing to express my strong support for MN HF1566, a bill that would provide families like mine the right to install safety locks in rental housing to protect our children from the dangers of elopement.

I am deeply sorry, but I am unable to discuss the details of Waey's death at this time as I am still grieving. However, I wanted to reach out to you to show my support for this bill. My hope is that my tragedy can inspire meaningful legislation so that no other family has to face what I did.

After Waey's death, many other mothers of autistic children reached out to me, sharing their own heartbreaking stories of their children's elopement risks. They explained how their landlords had denied them permission to install locks, despite their children being at risk. Some parents even installed locks anyway, only to be forced to remove them or face eviction. This is a crisis that demands action.

Protecting children and families should be a priority for our elected officials. This bill would provide crucial protections, ensuring that parents can take necessary steps to keep their children safe without the fear of losing their homes. No family should have to choose between their child's safety and their right to remain in their home.

I urge you to support MN HF1566 to prevent further tragedies and provide the essential protection that so many families desperately need.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Fay Jede

Minnesota House of Representatives
Housing Finance & Policy Committee
March 18, 2025

Re: Supporting HF1566 Keeping children with autism safe in their rental homes

Mr. Chair and members, many thanks for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Idil Abdull, I am a Somali Autism Mom and trying to retire advocate.

First, I want to thank Representative Hussein for his compassion, empathy, and relentless support for all autism families in Minnesota. We are grateful to him.

No one should imagine or worry about losing their child – ever. Yet, this has happened several times in Minnesota. Children with autism have eloped and wandered into danger and have lost their lives. Autism, as you many know, is a developmental disability. One of the main deficits and challenges our children have been safety skills. They are also drawn to water even if they do not know how to swim or stay safe around water.

It is imperative that landlords and apartment building owners understand this skill deficit and make reasonable accommodations for children with autism. There are simple and easy ways to safely modify a home. In today's high-tech world, one can purchase simple code and/or finger printing locks. There are security systems with cameras to monitor children to keep them safe.

I would also ask there is an educational component added to this. Just because the law states landlords must make reasonable accommodations for autism families to keep their children safe does not mean parents will understand what that means and what to buy. Just like we educate families about vaccines, we must also inform them about keeping their children safe especially if they have a disability.

I ask counties, pediatricians, and the department of health to collaborate and support families by educating them with information and resources.

https://www.reddit.com/r/altmpls/comments/1dkaltn/mother_of_4yearold_hopkins_boy_who_drowned_calls/?rdt=43437

Sincerely,

Idil Abdull – Somali Autism Mom

Testimony for the Record
Housing Finance & Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
Minnesota State Capitol
HF1566 (Rep. Hussein)
Maura Arnoldy, MA CCC-SLP
Bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist,
Parent of a child with autism

March 18, 2025

Dear Chairman Howard,

Thank you Chairman Howard and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to participate in today's hearing. It is an honor to be here to speak on behalf of my own child and young children in the autistic community.

My name is Maura Arnoldy and I am a bilingual speech-language pathologist in the Hopkins Schools Early Intervention program, and I am also the mother of an 8 year old child with autism. I would like to state for the record that the opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of Hopkins Schools or the Hopkins Early Intervention Program.

I am here today to urge the House to fully support and advance the proposed bill HF 1566, which is a bill related to housing and providing additional accommodations for children with autism. HF1566 aims to provide additional protocols for safety for children with autism residing in residential rental properties. Chapter 504B.213 outlines 3 components that ensure more safety accommodations for children with autism living in rental properties who are at risk for eloping. I am pleased that this Committee is taking steps to address the need for these additional accommodations that would ensure a safe living environment for families who have children with autism.

In my experience as a mother of a child with autism, and also over years of serving families who have children with autism, I have found that my child frequently will try to escape our home. Many families that I have worked with over the years have reported a similar concern; their children with autism make multiple attempts to escape from their homes or will wander off in the community. When a child attempts to escape or wander from a safe environment and/or away from their caregivers, this is referred to as **elopement, which poses a serious threat to the child's safety**. The National Autism Association and the Autism Society define eloping as an individual leaving a safe area or responsible caregiver. Statistics around elopement in the autistic community are staggering. 49% of children with autism will attempt to elope from a safe environment. These children are often drawn to water and are unaware of the dangers

associated with entering a body of water unsupervised, leading to potentially fatal outcomes. **Drowning is the number one cause of death in autistic children;** A six-year study by the Mortality and Risk Association found that 71% of deaths in the pediatric autistic population were due to accidental drowning. The National Autism Association has reported in an article on March 11, 2025 that this number is now up to 91% for autistic child wandering-related deaths from data in 2024 alone, a significant jump from previous years.

HF1566 could be a crucial policy change that would potentially reduce these numbers. By providing provisions for families in residential rental properties to utilize additional accommodations in their homes, many deaths could be prevented. The ability for families to work with their landlords to be able to use specialty door locks, other safety proofing equipment, door alarms, or other safety measures and accommodations that allow for home modifications would substantially increase their child's safety and provide parents a much needed peace of mind. We owe our children and these families better policies that can safeguard their child from eloping and finding their way to a body of water or other dangerous and potentially fatal situation. As a mother, I want to do everything in my power to keep my child safe in our home; equipping families, landlords, and rental properties in our community to do the same creates safer, more welcoming and stronger communities. Our autistic children can thrive when the community has more awareness and access to safety measures that can improve their quality of life for both the children and their amazing and resilient caregivers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Maura Arnoldy, MA CCC-SLP
Bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist
Parent of a child with autism

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