

# Response from Tim Walz, Elected Governor

*Safe Passage for Children of Minnesota is a nonprofit citizens' group that advocates for improvements in Minnesota's child welfare system. Our volunteer advocates throughout the state serve as watchdogs for the system governing child protection, foster care and related services. We are conducting a survey of all declared candidates for Minnesota governor to obtain their views on the current state of our child welfare system. The results of this survey are being shared broadly throughout Minnesota.*

***This is what the governor said during the campaign, and we will be tracking his performance to see how he follows through on his commitment.***

Read on for Safe Passage for Children's questions and Candidate Tim Walz's responses:

**Safe Passage for Children: Our child protection system is overburdened in many Minnesota counties. For example, child protection worker caseloads have increased. Do you favor increased state funding for our child protection system, overall?**

Tim Walz: Yes. Governor Dayton and the Legislature made important progress in the 2015 legislative session by enacting reforms to Minnesota's child protection system, including expanded state funding for the system. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go. In recent years, Minnesota has been on the low end nationally in terms of the share of child protection dollars made up by state funds (as opposed to local or federal dollars). As you note, our system is still dramatically underfunded and child-protection workers' caseloads have skyrocketed. The Walz-Flanagan Administration will change that trend. We support dramatic, across-the-board increases in funding to our child protection system. We need to take real steps, quickly, to lessen the fiscal burden on local governments and ensure that child protection workers, on the ground level in counties across the state, have the resources they need.

**Safe Passage for Children: The Task Force on the Protection of Children recommended that child protection workers discontinue the practice of interviewing victims in the presence of their alleged abusers (who may be parents or caregivers). Do you favor changing this recommendation to a requirement?**

Tim Walz: : Yes. This straightforward recommendation is supported by research and experts in social work and child psychology. It needs to be a requirement statewide.

**Safe Passage for Children: Children of color, especially African Americans and Native Americans, are disproportionately over-represented in the child protection system. What steps would you consider to ensure that the system is working in the best interests of all Minnesota children?**

Tim Walz: First, we come back to the issue of funding. If the state is not doing its part to adequately fund our child protection system, it exacerbates disparities that already exist between local communities trying to piece together funding to meet their child-protection needs. We support significant increases in funding for the state's child protection system.

Second, a Walz-Flanagan Administration would start with the thoughtful recommendations that the Task Force on the Protection of Children has already issued on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the state's child protection system. These include working with communities that are over-represented in our child protection system to develop policies and strategies for engaging in child protection in those communities; increasing the percentage of child protection workers who are from those communities; and increasing direct state funding for early intervention and prevention services in those communities. We would work closely with Tribal Governments in particular, starting from the baseline position of respecting and deferring to their sovereignty, supporting and implementing the Indian Child Welfare Act, and working to support them in

developing impactful and culturally meaningful child welfare services and in improving working relationships with county governments.

Third, although the Task Force has provided helpful recommendations, we would also focus our efforts on reducing disparities in parts of the system not covered by the Task Force, including for children who have been placed in foster care services.

**Safe Passage for Children: Please provide any additional comments on Minnesota's child protection system and how you would approach that system as Governor (max. 200 words).**

Tim Walz: We're particularly proud that Tim's running mate, Rep. Peggy Flanagan, led the Children's Defense Fund in Minnesota before serving in the legislature and was a member of the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children. She helped develop the Task Force's recommendations and will lead our Administration's efforts to make continued improvements to Minnesota's child protection services. Some of these improvements we have already covered, such as funding, working to reduce racial and ethnic disparities, and improving information-gathering practices. There are many more, however, such as streamlining and centralizing reporting and screening tools; improving and standardizing training; expanding oversight of child protection workers at the local level; increasing transparency and accountability in the system; and developing a foster care policy that ensures child safety. In short, there is much work to do, on the recommendations still outstanding from the Task Force, and beyond. The Walz-Flanagan Administration will get to work, on day one, on improving our child protection system. We have the experience, given Peggy's years of leadership on this issue, to get that work done.