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Minn. R. Civ. App. P. 136.01, subd. 1(c).*

**STATE OF MINNESOTA  
IN COURT OF APPEALS  
A26-0483**

In the Matter of the Welfare of the Child(ren) of:

K. L. S. and C. C. S., Parents.

**Filed September 8, 2026  
Affirmed  
Cochran, Judge**

St. Louis County District Court  
File Nos. 69HI-JV-24-64, 69HI-JV-23-33

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Sara Henkel, Virginia, Minnesota (guardian ad litem)

Considered and decided by Cochran, Presiding Judge; Worke, Judge; and Bond, Judge.

**NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION**

**COCHRAN**, Judge

On appeal from a district court's order terminating parental rights, appellant mother challenges the district court's determination that respondent county made reasonable

efforts to rehabilitate her and reunite her with the children, that termination is supported by a statutory basis, and that termination of her parental rights is in the children's best interests. We affirm.

## **FACTS**

This case concerns the termination of appellant mother K.L.S.'s parental rights to her two oldest children, Child 1 and Child 2, born in 2012 and 2013. Mother also has two younger children, Child 3 and Child 4, born in 2016 and 2019. Mother consented to the adoption of Child 3 and Child 4 in 2025, and her parental rights to these two children are not at issue on appeal. Additionally, father, C.C.S., whose parental rights to all four children have been terminated, is not a party to this appeal. The following summarizes the district court's findings of fact and conclusions of law in its order terminating mother's parental rights to Child 1 and Child 2, supplemented by the record as necessary to understand the issues on appeal.

### *The County's Involvement with the Family, 2019-2022*

Respondent St. Louis County Public Health and Human Services Department (the county) became involved with the family in 2019. The county's involvement was based on concerns related to, among other issues, child neglect, substance use in the home, and exposure to domestic violence. In one incident in 2019, father hit mother and left her with a black eye. One of the children was present at the time of the assault. Father was arrested and went to jail. Father was later released from jail and returned home. The county provided voluntary assistance to the family beginning in 2019. In 2021, the county

documented further concerns regarding the children's school attendance, mother's sobriety, and the presence of unsafe individuals in the home.

In March 2022, the parents divorced. In December 2022, the county opened a new case-management file based on allegations that mother was allowing unsafe people into the home while the children were present. A county social worker also reported that the home was "filthy with garbage, food, and clothes," that mother "sleeps for days," and that it was unclear whether anyone in the home was caring for the children.

Due to these concerns, the county created case plans for the family. The plans were "voluntary targeted case management plans, calling for [mother] to ensure that [Child 1 and Child 2] attend school on a regular basis, live in a home free from substance use and domestic violence, obtain diagnostic assessments and follow recommendations, and have safe and sober caregivers." The plans also called for mother "to sign [releases of information], obtain a [diagnostic assessment] for herself and follow recommendations, address her physical and mental health needs, and make necessary phone calls to accomplish the plan goals."

*Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) Petition and Order*

On March 7, 2023, the county filed a CHIPS petition alleging that the children were in need of protection or services because mother was not providing adequate supervision and care of the children, was not ensuring the children attended school, used substances in front of the children, allowed unsafe individuals in the home, failed to follow through with medical appointments, and could not safely parent the children. The county also requested protective supervision of the children, which the district court granted on March 27.

About two months later, on May 2, 2023, police officers arrested mother after finding her passed out in her vehicle with methamphetamine in her possession. That same day, a social worker went to mother's home to check on the children and discovered that the children were in the care of mother's boyfriend. They also credibly suspected that the boyfriend was under the influence of controlled substances at the time he was caring for the children. Another individual was also at the home. Two days later, the district court held an emergency protective care hearing and awarded temporary custody of the children to the county for purposes of out-of-home placement.

The county then created out-of-home placement plans that were approved by the district court. The plans were developed with mother and based on the existing December 2022 targeted case-management plans. The case plans addressed concerns related to mother's substance use, neglect of the children, and the children's exposure to domestic violence. The plans required mother to: (1) "be a safe and sober caregiver by identifying triggers and emotions that lead to [substance] use, by obtaining and maintaining sobriety through use of supports, complete a chemical-use assessment and follow recommendations, comply with [urinalysis tests (UAs)], and complete hair follicle testing"; (2) participate in therapy; (3) engage in parenting education; (4) demonstrate parenting skills; (5) "maintain[] safe and stable housing and ensure that the children have safe and sober caregivers"; (6) "sign releases"; (7) "demonstrate accountability skills"; (8) respectfully work with the county; and (9) "remain law abiding." Later iterations of the plans added requirements for mother to obtain an Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS) provider, participate in "a sexual assault program to reduce her

co-dependence on men,” and refrain from letting unsafe individuals into the home. The district court found that the plan requirements regarding mother’s mental health “were specifically targeted to increase [mother’s] resiliency and ability to manage stress, understand and cope with both her and the children’s trauma histories and current and future mental health needs, and provide a safe and supportive environment to discuss issues arising within the home and family system.” The district court further found that the elements of the case plans “were appropriate expectations” for mother.

Following development of the case plans, the county provided services and support to mother to address the conditions that resulted in the children’s removal from the home. The services included: assisting mother in getting help to address her substance use, transportation assistance, funds to reinstate mother’s driver’s license, coaching for parenting skills, support for medical and mental health appointments, safety planning, and respite care.

Although the county provided assistance to mother and reminded mother multiple times that her case plan required her to maintain a safe and sober home, mother continued to use substances and allow unsafe individuals into the home. For example, in May 2023, the social worker noted that mother continued to struggle with substance use and was dating an individual with an extensive criminal history including crimes of violence. In May 2024, mother completed an updated comprehensive assessment following an alcohol involved incident when mother was assaulted by a boyfriend and was found to be misusing a prescription medication—Gabapentin—and in possession of another substance—Adderall—without a prescription. And in June 2024, mother spent 24 hours in jail after

she was found with a bottle of whiskey and in the company of a man who was on warrant status.

On August 8, 2024, mother was scheduled to have a two-hour supervised visit with the children. But mother called the social worker “and said she was being sent to detox and needed to cancel the visit.” The social worker later received communication from mother’s probation officer that mother was misusing medication and the district court “ordered her to go to detox and get an updated assessment,” which caused her to miss the visit.

Additionally, prior to filing the termination of parental rights (TPR) petition, the county attempted a trial home visit for Child 1 that was unsuccessful.<sup>1</sup> The visit lasted from November 2023 to May 2024. The visit ended after the county documented issues of domestic violence in the home between mother and her boyfriend, substance use by mother, and an incident in which mother was sexually assaulted by her boyfriend in the home.

#### *TPR Petition*

On September 18, 2024, approximately a year and a half after the CHIPS petition was filed,<sup>2</sup> the county petitioned to terminate mother’s parental rights. The county alleged four statutory grounds for termination under Minnesota Statutes section 260C.301(b) (2024): (1) failure to comply with the duties imposed by the parent and child relationship;

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<sup>1</sup> Child 2 did not participate in trial home visits and remained in out-of-home placement from May 2023 to the time of trial.

<sup>2</sup> In June 2023, prior to the filing of the TPR petition, mother entered admissions to the allegations in the CHIPS petition.

(2) palpable unfitness; (3) failure to correct the conditions that led to the children's out-of-home placement, despite reasonable efforts by the county; and (4) neglect of the children in foster care. Mother denied the allegations.

A second trial home visit for Child 1 took place from December 11 to 20, 2024, following the filing of the TPR petition and before the TPR trial. This visit ended abruptly after mother acknowledged that she was in contact with an unsafe person and continued to use controlled substances. On the date that the visit was terminated, mother's probation officer found clear evidence on mother's phone that she was buying and selling controlled substances and had recently used hallucinogenic mushrooms. Mother was arrested and ordered to remain incarcerated until a bed became available at an inpatient treatment facility. Mother was discharged to inpatient treatment in January 2025 and completed treatment in March. The social worker noted that, at that point, mother "will be transitioning to mental health court." A diagnostic assessment completed around that same time stated that mother "never felt a need to cut down on her alcohol or drug use and she described herself as being 'highly impulsive' regarding . . . entering relationships."

During the summer of 2025, mother renewed her relationship with an ex-boyfriend who had previously abused her. In the fall of 2025, the county continued to have concerns about domestic violence in the home after the social worker observed that mother had a black eye and cuts on her face. Additionally, mother's probation officer reported concerns about mother's misuse of prescription medications and her inability to account for missing medications. In December 2025, mother was seen in a liquor store, which mother acknowledged at trial was a violation of the expectations imposed upon her by the court.

After the incident at the liquor store, mother was placed on electronic home monitoring, with tracking and alcohol testing and ordered to get a new comprehensive substance-use assessment. Mother voluntarily resumed treatment that month, but did not attend consistently. Additionally, mother was seen at a bar in Hibbing in January 2026, just prior to the TPR trial.

During the time between the filing of the TPR petition and the trial, the county continued to offer services to mother and the children including, but not limited to: helping mother find treatment; finding foster placements for Child 1 and Child 2; assisting mother with medical issues; providing support for mother's medical appointments; coordinating the second trial home visit for Child 1; and finding specialized health options for Child 2.

#### *TPR Trial*

On January 28, 2026, the district court held a one-day trial on the TPR petition. The district court heard testimony from several witnesses, including: mother, the county social worker, a foster parent, the guardian ad litem (GAL), two of mother's service providers, and Child 1. The district court also received 61 exhibits into evidence.

In a thorough and detailed order filed on February 27, the district court concluded that clear and convincing evidence supported each of the four statutory grounds for termination of mother's parental rights as alleged in the petition.<sup>3</sup> The district court also

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<sup>3</sup> We note that there is a discrepancy between the statutory citations in the district court's findings of fact and conclusions of law. The district court found that the county established four statutory bases under Minnesota Statutes sections 260C.301, subd. 1(b)(2), (4), (5), and (8) (2024). But in the district court's conclusions of law, it indicated that termination was supported by section 260C.301, subdivision 1(b)(2), (3), (4), and (7) (2024). The district court's reference to these subdivisions in its conclusions of law is consistent with

found that the county made reasonable efforts to rehabilitate mother and reunify the family, but that mother “failed to honestly engage with the offered services, failed to take account for her own actions and limitations,” and failed to address her own mental-health and chemical-dependency needs to be able to care for the children. In the order, the district court also found that “[mother’s] testimony was not credible as to multiple significant points.” And the district court found that termination of mother’s parental rights was in the children’s best interests. Based on its analysis of these factors, the district court granted the county’s petition to terminate mother’s parental rights to Child 1 and Child 2.

Mother appeals.

### DECISION

Parental rights may be terminated only for “grave and weighty reasons.” *In re Welfare of M.D.O.*, 462 N.W.2d 370, 375 (Minn. 1990). To involuntarily terminate parental rights, a district court must determine that: (1) the county made reasonable efforts to rehabilitate the parent and reunify the family or that such efforts were not required; (2) at least one of the statutory grounds for terminating parental rights exists; and (3) termination is in the child’s best interests. Minn. Stat. §§ 260C.301, subds. 1(b), 7, 8; .317, subd. 1 (2024); *see also In re Welfare of Child. of S.E.P.*, 744 N.W.2d 381, 385 (Minn. 2008).

An appellate court reviews a district court’s decision to terminate parental rights “to determine whether the district court’s findings address the statutory criteria and whether

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the county’s petition. For the reasons discussed below, we determine that clear and convincing evidence supports the termination of mother’s parental rights under section 260C.301, subdivision 1(b)(4), and we do not reach the remaining statutory grounds.

the district court's findings are supported by substantial evidence and are not clearly erroneous." *S.E.P.*, 744 N.W.2d at 385. "A finding is clearly erroneous if it is either manifestly contrary to the weight of the evidence or not reasonably supported by the evidence as a whole." *In re Welfare of Child. of T.R.*, 750 N.W.2d 656, 660-61 (Minn. 2008) (quotation omitted). We review a district court's ultimate decision to terminate parental rights for an abuse of discretion. *In re Welfare of Child of J.H.*, 968 N.W.2d 593, 600 (Minn. App. 2021), *rev. denied* (Minn. Dec. 6, 2021); *see also S.E.P.*, 744 N.W.2d at 385 (noting that a reviewing court gives "considerable deference to the district court's decision to terminate parental rights").

Mother raises three issues on appeal. First, she argues that the district court abused its discretion by concluding that the county made reasonable efforts to rehabilitate her and reunify her with the children. Second, mother contends that the district court abused its discretion when it found that the county proved four separate statutory bases for termination by clear and convincing evidence. Third, she asserts that the district court abused its discretion by determining that termination of her parental rights is in the best interests of the children. We address each argument in turn.

**I. The district court acted within its discretion when it determined that the county made reasonable efforts to reunify the family.**

We first address mother's challenge to the district court's determination that the county made reasonable efforts to reunify mother with the children. Prior to terminating parental rights, a district court must rule that the county made reasonable efforts to rehabilitate the parent and reunify the family or determine that reasonable efforts are not

statutorily required. Minn. Stat. § 260C.301, subd. 8; *see also* Minn. Stat. § 260.012(a) (2024); *T.R.*, 750 N.W.2d at 664. Reasonable efforts are “services that go beyond mere matters of form so as to include real, genuine assistance.” *In re Welfare of Child. of S.W.*, 727 N.W.2d 144, 150 (Minn. App. 2007) (quotation omitted), *rev. denied* (Minn. Mar. 28, 2007). “The county’s efforts must be aimed at alleviating the conditions that gave rise to out-of-home placement, and they must conform to the problems presented.” *In re Welfare of Child of J.K.T.*, 814 N.W.2d 76, 88 (Minn. App. 2012). In analyzing the reasonableness of the county’s efforts, the district court must consider whether the services offered were:

- (1) selected in collaboration with the child’s family and, if appropriate, the child;
- (2) tailored to the individualized needs of the child and child’s family;
- (3) relevant to the safety, protection, and well-being of the child;
- (4) adequate to meet the individualized needs of the child and family;
- (5) culturally appropriate;
- (6) available and accessible;
- (7) consistent and timely; and
- (8) realistic under the circumstances.

Minn. Stat. § 260.012(h) (2024). The district court also weighs “the length of the time the county was involved and the quality of effort given.” *In re Welfare of H.K.*, 455 N.W.2d 529, 532 (Minn. App. 1990), *rev. denied* (Minn. July 6, 1990). The county bears the burden of proving that it made reasonable efforts. Minn. Stat. § 260.012(f) (2024). “[W]hat constitutes ‘reasonable efforts’ depends on the facts of each case.” *J.H.*, 968 N.W.2d at 601. We review the district court’s ultimate determination about the reasonableness of the county’s efforts for an abuse of discretion and the underlying findings

of fact for clear error. *In re Welfare of Child of D.L.D.*, 865 N.W.2d 315, 321-22 (Minn. App. 2015), *rev. denied* (Minn. July 20, 2015).

In its order terminating mother's parental rights, the district court determined that the county provided reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that led to the children's out-of-home placement and reunify the family. These efforts included, among others, a chemical-health assessment, assistance in obtaining treatment for mother's substance abuse, UAs to assist mother with demonstrating sobriety, transportation and phone-service assistance, referrals for diagnostic assessments and psychological evaluations, parenting-education services, visitation, respite care, parenting skills coaching, assistance with obtaining an order for protection (OFP) against a boyfriend, changing the locks on her door, and safety planning. In addition, the district court found the county "made numerous offers to help [mother] establish ongoing supports," which included "ARMHS services, recovery support services, sexual assault support services, and domestic violence support services." The district court characterized these services as "extensive" and "beyond reasonable" in responding to the needs of the family. Additionally, the district court specifically found that "there are no additional services or programs that would likely enable [mother] to assume custody of the children in the foreseeable future."

On appeal, mother argues that the district court abused its discretion when it ruled that the county made reasonable efforts to rehabilitate mother and reunify the family. In support of this argument, she does not contend that any of the district court's underlying findings of fact are clearly erroneous. Instead, she raises two general concerns with the district court's determination. We are not persuaded by either claim.

### *Services Related to Domestic Violence*

First, mother contends that the county's "assistance in addressing her status as a domestic violence survivor [was] lacking." But mother does not identify any specific, additional services that she believes the county should have reasonably provided to assist mother in addressing her status as a domestic violence survivor. And, while the county bears the burden of proving at the TPR trial that it put forth reasonable efforts, "[o]ur caselaw does not allow us to presume error on appeal" and "any error must be made to appear affirmatively before there can be reversal." *In the Matter of Welfare of Child. of L.P.*, 36 N.W.3d 419, 430-31 (Minn. App. 2026) (quotation and citation omitted) (noting that "[t]he burden of showing error rests upon the one who relies upon it" (quotation omitted)). Further, mother did not raise this argument at the TPR trial. Therefore, the argument is forfeited. *See In re Welfare of T.D.*, 731 N.W.2d 548, 553 (Minn. App. 2007) (determining that parent forfeited review of an issue not raised in district court in a TPR proceeding); *see also Thiele v. Stich*, 425 N.W.2d 580, 582 (Minn. 1988) (stating "[a] reviewing court must generally consider only those issues that the record shows were presented and considered by the [district] court in deciding the matter before it" (quotation omitted)).

Even so, mother's argument lacks merit. At trial, the social worker testified that she assisted mother in "work[ing] through the trauma of her . . . domestic violence relationship she was in with her significant other." Additionally, the trial record reflects that the county offered mother a number of resources related to her status as a domestic violence survivor, such as help obtaining an OFP against a boyfriend, changing the locks on mother's door,

making referrals to sexual assault programs and an ARMHS worker, and developing safety plans. The county's provision of these services refutes mother's claim that the county did not provide services relevant to mother's status as a domestic violence survivor. *See, e.g., S.E.P.*, 744 N.W.2d at 386-87 (noting that a county's assistance in offering mother mental health and social services amounted to reasonable efforts to help with issues related to domestic violence).

#### *Children's Mental Health Needs*

Second, mother contends that the county failed to provide services "other than parenting education" to help mother meet the children's mental health needs and consequently the services provided by the county were not reasonable. Mother argues that, "Had she been provided therapeutic parenting education, she would have perhaps been able to demonstrate her ability to meet the children's mental health needs." Here again, mother raises an issue that she did not raise at trial and consequently this argument is forfeited. *See T.D.*, 731 N.W.2d at 553 (declining to reach issue not addressed in district court); *Thiele*, 425 N.W.2d at 582 (same).

But even assuming the issue is properly before us, the argument is not persuasive. Mother does not explain what "therapeutic parenting education" involves, whether this type of education was available, and whether a basis exists to conclude that such education could have helped mother meet the children's mental health needs. In other words, mother has not demonstrated how the absence of this service makes the county's efforts unreasonable. A county is not required to make every possible effort to reunify a family; it is required to make *reasonable* efforts. *See* Minn. Stat. § 260.012(a). And "what

constitutes ‘reasonable efforts’ depends on the facts of each case.” *J.H.*, 968 N.W.2d at 601.

Here, the district court found—and the record supports—that the county made reasonable efforts in regard to the children’s mental health needs. These efforts included intensive family-based services, trial home visits, and other services. The social worker testified that the children had “high needs” and that the county provided services to ensure mother could get the children to their mental-health appointments. But the social worker also noted that mother was not consistently meeting this need. Based on the record evidence, we reject mother’s claim that the county failed to provide reasonable efforts by not offering “therapeutic parenting education.”

#### *Conclusion Regarding Reasonable Efforts*

In sum, the record supports the district court’s findings regarding the efforts the county made, and those findings support the district court’s determination that those efforts were reasonable. We discern no abuse of discretion in the district court’s determination in that regard.

## **II. The district court acted within its discretion by determining that a statutory ground exists to terminate mother’s parental rights.**

We next consider mother’s argument that the district court abused its discretion when it determined that the county met its burden to show one or more statutory grounds existed to support termination of mother’s parental rights. Again, we are not persuaded.

To involuntarily terminate parental rights, the district court must find that the county established by clear and convincing evidence “one or more” of the statutory grounds set

forth in section 260C.301, subdivision 1(b). Minn. Stat. § 260C.301, subd. 1(b); *In re Child. of T.A.A.*, 702 N.W.2d 703, 708 (Minn. 2005) (“In reviewing a decision to terminate parental rights, the appellate court determines whether there is clear and convincing evidence to support at least one statutory ground for termination . . .”). If clear and convincing evidence exists to support at least one of the statutory grounds found by the district court, an appellate court need not address whether the other statutory grounds found by the district court are supported by the record. *J.K.T.*, 814 N.W.2d at 92 (confirming that appellate courts “need only one properly supported statutory ground in order to affirm a termination order”).

Here, the district court concluded that the county proved by clear and convincing evidence that four separate statutory grounds set forth in section 260C.301, subdivision 1(b), existed to support termination of mother’s parental rights. For the reasons discussed below, we conclude that the record supports the district court’s determination that the county proved at least one statutory ground by clear and convincing evidence—section 260C.301, subdivision 1(b)(4). Accordingly, we limit our analysis to that statutory ground. *See* Minn. Stat. § 260C.301, subd. 1(b)(4); *see also J.K.T.*, 814 N.W.2d at 92.

Under section 260C.301, subdivision 1(b)(4), a district court has grounds to terminate a parent’s rights if “reasonable efforts, under the direction of the court, have failed to correct the conditions leading to the child’s placement.” Minn. Stat. § 260C.301, subd. 1(b)(4). The statute includes a presumption that reasonable efforts have failed upon a showing that: (1) “a child [of the age of the children at issue here] has resided out of the parental home under court order for a cumulative period of 12 months within the preceding

22 months”; (2) “the court has approved the out-of-home placement plan”; (3) the “conditions leading to the out-of-home placement have not been corrected” as shown by the parent not “substantially compl[ying] with the court’s orders and a reasonable case plan”; and (4) “reasonable efforts have been made by the [county] to rehabilitate the parent and reunite the family.” *Id.*, subd. 1(b)(4)(i)-(iv).

The district court found that each of these four factors in subdivision 1(b)(iv) were satisfied by clear and convincing evidence because: (1) the children were in out-of-home placement for 1,002 days as of the date of trial; (2) case plans were prepared for the family and approved by the district court; (3) mother failed to correct the conditions leading to the out-of-home placement; and (4) the county made reasonable efforts to rehabilitate mother and reunite the family.

Mother does not challenge the district court’s findings with respect to the first two factors, which are supported by the record. Accordingly, we focus on the third and fourth factors. We address these two factors in reverse order. As to the fourth factor, we conclude that the record fully supports the district court’s determination that the county made reasonable efforts to reunify the family for the reasons that we discussed above. Thus, the pivotal question is whether clear and convincing evidence supports the district court’s finding on the third factor—that mother failed to correct the conditions leading to the out-of-home placement of the children.

When reviewing a district court’s factual findings for clear error, appellate courts “view the evidence in a light favorable to the findings” and do not reweigh the evidence or reconcile conflicting evidence. *In re Civ. Commitment of Kenney*, 963 N.W.2d 214, 221

(Minn. 2021); *see also J.H.*, 968 N.W.2d at 601 n.6 (applying *Kenney* in a TPR appeal). Additionally, appellate courts “need not go into an extended discussion of the evidence to prove or demonstrate the correctness of the findings of the [district] court.” *Kenney*, 963 N.W.2d at 222 (quotation omitted). “[A]n appellate court’s duty is fully performed after it has fairly considered all the evidence and has determined that the evidence reasonably supports the decision.” *Id.* (quotation omitted).

Here, the district court found that mother had failed to substantially comply with the conditions in the case plan relating to (1) her chemical dependency and (2) her ability to provide the children with a safe and stable home—conditions that led to the children’s out-of-home placement. “It is presumed that conditions leading to a child’s out-of-home placement have not been corrected upon a showing that the parent or parents have not substantially complied with the court’s orders and a reasonable case plan.” Minn. Stat. § 260C.301, subd. 1(b)(4)(iii). We discuss the findings on each of these conditions in turn and discern no clear error by the district court in its findings.

First, as to chemical dependency, the case plan required mother to be a safe and sober caregiver, obtain and maintain sobriety, complete a chemical-use assessment and follow recommendations, and comply with UAs. Yet, despite the county’s efforts, the district court found “that [mother] has not made sufficient progress in her recovery for the court to be able to conclude that she is likely to remain sober” in the foreseeable future. The district court noted that mother “has been seen in the community in alcohol related situations twice recently and was not honest with her [chemical dependency counselor] about one of those incidents.” Additionally, the district court found that mother had

“recently been sanctioned for misuse of prescriptions.” These findings are supported by the record and are not clearly erroneous.

Second, the case plan required mother to maintain a safe and stable home and ensure the children had safe and sober caregivers. The district court found that this condition of the case plan was not met because mother “continued to engage in unhealthy relationships with unsafe men involved in the criminal justice system.” The district court also noted that mother “repeatedly acknowledged that she could not keep certain individuals out of her home and out of her life and that she seemingly did not have the ability to maintain safe boundaries for herself and her children.” The district court further found that mother’s “repeated pattern of unsafe decision making” remained the “primary obstacle to her ability to safely parent and provide a safe home environment for the children.” These findings also are supported by the evidence at trial and are not clearly erroneous. Accordingly, we conclude that the district court did not abuse its discretion when it determined that mother failed to correct the conditions that led to the out-of-home placement of the children.

In urging us to reverse, mother asks us to take a narrow view of the reasons the children were removed from the home, arguing that her “use of methamphetamine” was the sole reason that the children were removed from the home and further arguing that she addressed her methamphetamine use. In support of her argument, she emphasizes there was testimony that she was not using methamphetamine at the time of trial. But mother’s argument ignores that the district court ordered the children removed from mother’s care based not only on her methamphetamine use but also based on concerns about mother’s ability to safely care for the children, lack of supervision of the children, and exposure to

domestic violence. Additionally, mother's use of methamphetamine raised concerns about substance use generally. Consequently, the case plans required mother to be "a safe and sober caregiver" and "maintain safe and stable housing and ensure the children have safe and sober caregivers." And, as discussed above, the record shows that the concerns about both safety and substance use were not corrected by the time of trial. We therefore do not consider this argument persuasive.

In sum, based on the evidence in the record, we conclude that the district court acted within its discretion when it determined under section 260C.301, subdivision 1(b)(4), that mother failed to correct the conditions leading to the children's out-of-home placement, even with reasonable efforts by the county.

**III. The district court acted within its discretion by determining that it was in the children's best interests to terminate mother's parental rights.**

Lastly, we consider mother's argument that the district court abused its discretion by concluding that terminating her parental rights is in the best interests of Child 1 and Child 2. This argument is unavailing.

A child's best interests are the "paramount consideration" in termination proceedings. Minn. Stat. § 260C.301, subd. 7; *see also* Minn. Stat. § 260C.001, subd. 2(a) (2024). A district court may not terminate parental rights unless doing so is in the child's best interests even when a statutory basis exists to support termination. *In re Welfare of the Child of D.L.D.*, 771 N.W.2d 538, 545 (Minn. App. 2009). Courts are to balance three factors when considering a child's best interests: (1) "the child's interest[s] in preserving the parent-child relationship," (2) "the parent's interest[s] in preserving the parent-child

relationship,” and (3) “any competing interests of the child.” Minn. R. Juv. Prot. P. 58.04(c)(2)(ii); *see also In re Welfare Child of A.M.C.*, 920 N.W.2d 648, 657 (Minn. App. 2018). The competing interests of the child “include such things as a stable environment, health considerations and the child’s preferences.” *In re Welfare of Child. of J.R.B.*, 805 N.W.2d 895, 905 (Minn. App. 2011) (quotation omitted), *rev. denied* (Minn. Jan. 6, 2012). Any “conflicts between the rights of the child and rights of the parents are resolved in favor of the child.” *Id.* at 902. We review the district court’s best-interests determination for an abuse of discretion. *Id.* at 905. “Because the best-interests analysis involves credibility determinations and is generally not susceptible to an appellate court’s global review of a record, we give considerable deference to the district court’s findings.” *J.K.T.*, 814 N.W.2d at 92 (quotation omitted).

The district court’s order included specific findings on the three best-interests factors and concluded that termination of mother’s parental rights was in the best interests of the children. First, the district court found that Child 1 and Child 2 expressed a desire to be reunited with mother. Second, the district court acknowledged mother’s “interest in preserving the parent-child relationship.” Third, as to the children’s competing interests, the district court found that “[Child 2] is in, and [Child 1 is] moving towards, a permanent placement that is an adoption resource for them.” The district court also found that mother was “not in a position where she could safely assume custody of the children.” In balancing the interests, the district court stated that “any interest in preserving the [parent-child] relationship would be nominal at best and would come at significant risk to the children.”

Based upon its consideration of the three best-interests factors, the district court concluded that “the balance overwhelmingly favors termination.”

This district court’s findings of fact are supported by clear and convincing evidence and we discern no abuse of discretion by the district court in its weighing of the factors. The district court heard testimony from the social worker that the children could not be safely returned to mother at the time of trial or “at any point in the foreseeable future.” The social worker testified that the children both had “a particular need to achieve permanency” and that it was in their best interests to terminate mother’s parental rights. The GAL similarly testified, “The children deserve and need stability of safe and suitable housing . . . and to be with caregivers who can meet their needs.” The district court found the testimony from the social worker and the GAL credible, and we defer to those credibility assessments. *See M.D.O.*, 462 N.W.2d at 374-75 (stating that fact-finding is the domain of the district court, which is in a “superior position” to assess witness credibility). The district court’s balancing of the three best-interests factors and its findings of fact regarding the best-interests factors are well supported by the record.

To persuade us otherwise, mother argues that the district court’s findings are inadequate and that the district court failed to properly weigh the preferences of the children. Neither argument is persuasive.

First, mother contends that the district court’s findings are insufficient to allow for meaningful appellate review. We disagree. A district court is not required to “go into great detail” when evaluating the best-interests factors, *In re Welfare of Child of W.L.P.*, 678 N.W.2d 703, 711 (Minn. App. 2004), so long as it “explain[s] why termination is in

the best interests of the child,” *D.L.D.*, 771 N.W.2d at 545. Here, the district court made findings on each of the best-interests factors. And its decision reflects that it considered the interests of mother, the children’s interests, and any competing interests of the children in finding permanency. Based on the district court’s findings, which are supported by the record, we are satisfied that the district court adequately explained its reasons for concluding that termination was in the children’s best interests.

Second, mother argues that the district court disregarded the children’s testimony that they preferred to be reunited with her. Both children expressed a preference to live with mother. Here, the district court acknowledged that the children’s testimony that they wanted to live with mother and found that the children’s “love and support” for mother was “laudable and understandable.” But the district court reasoned that the children’s preferences “[did] not reflect a sophisticated understanding of their needs and their mother’s ability to meet those needs.” The district court further determined that the children’s interest in maintaining the parent-child relationship did not outweigh the competing needs of the children, which mother would be unable to meet “in the foreseeable future.” After evaluating the best-interests factors, the district court concluded that “the balance overwhelmingly favors termination.” We will not reweigh this assessment on appeal. *See Vangsness v. Vangsness*, 607 N.W.2d 468, 477 (Minn. App. 2000) (noting that in the context of child-custody matters, the law “leaves scant if any room for an appellate court to question the [district] court’s balancing of best-interests considerations”). We

therefore discern no abuse of discretion in the district court's determination that it is in the children's best interests to terminate mother's parental rights.

**Affirmed.**