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

**STATE OF MINNESOTA  
IN COURT OF APPEALS  
A26-0636**

In the Matter of the Welfare of the Child of:

C. C. H., and H. A. H. S., Parents.

**Filed October 5, 2026  
Affirmed  
Schmidt, Judge**

Pine County District Court  
File No. 58-JV-25-151

Mackenzie Guptil, Pine City, Minnesota (for appellant C.C.H.)

Reese Frederickson, Pine County Attorney, Sydney Silko, Assistant County Attorney, Pine City, Minnesota (for respondent Pine County Health & Human Services)

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Considered and decided by Schmidt, Presiding Judge; Ede, Judge; and Reilly, Judge.\*

**NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION**

**SCHMIDT**, Judge

Appellant C.C.H. (mother) challenges the district court's termination of her parental rights to her son, arguing that the district court abused its discretion by determining that (1) respondent Pine County Health and Human Services (the county) made reasonable

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\* Retired judge of the Minnesota Court of Appeals, serving by appointment pursuant to Minn. Const. art. VI, § 10.

efforts to reunite the family, (2) statutory grounds exist for termination, and (3) termination is in the child's best interests. We affirm.

## **FACTS**

The county has been involved with mother and the child since the child's birth in 2019, when the hospital notified the county that mother tested positive for THC.<sup>1</sup> The county thereafter received numerous child-protection reports about the child; conducted multiple investigations, during which it learned that the child has special needs; and repeatedly offered mother services on a voluntary basis. Over the child's first several years, the county had recurring concerns, including neglect, soiled clothing, excessive trash in the home, exposure to domestic violence, and inadequate supervision.

In February 2023, the county received a report that the child (then three years old) was found walking alone down a street. After that incident, the county initiated a child in need of protection or services (CHIPS) proceeding and undertook protective supervision of mother and the child for several months. When mother's home circumstances improved, the district court terminated CHIPS jurisdiction in July 2023.

In August 2023, the county received a report that mother was seen throwing the child outside and locking the door. In October 2023, mother threatened to leave the child on other people's doorstep because he was "just too much."

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<sup>1</sup> The child's father was not a custodial parent and largely did not participate in the underlying child-protection matter. His parental rights to the child were also terminated and he is not participating in this appeal.

In mid-August 2024, the county received a report that the child (then nearly five years old) was seen alone, without shoes, and running on a roadway. When police responded, mother was unaware the child was outside. On August 24, 2024, police responded around 5:00 a.m. to a report that the child was alone at a gas station about a half mile from where mother and the child were staying. Officers found the child wearing only underwear and a T-shirt. The child was put into emergency protective care.

Days later, the district court conducted an emergency-protective-care hearing and placed the child in the county's custody. The county thereafter filed a CHIPS petition. Mother admitted parts of the petition, acknowledging that the child lacks necessary care because he had absconded from the home, and that she needs services to meet his needs for safety. The district court adjudicated the child as in need of protection or services.

The county established a case plan for mother, which included requiring mother to complete a psychological evaluation and follow all recommendations, to secure the home to prevent the child from absconding, and to maintain contact with the case manager and guardian ad litem. The district court approved the case plan.

Mother completed a psychological evaluation in March and April 2025. Mother failed to attend the postevaluation session and, when contacted by phone, said that she forgot to check her email and had to leave for work. The service sent mother a copy of the evaluation report. The report indicated diagnoses of complex posttraumatic stress disorder and multiple substance-use disorders and recommended psychotherapy to address her mental health. The report noted that mother exhibited "poor" judgment and that she did not take responsibility for the child absconding.

The county updated mother's case plan to require her to successfully complete the recommendations from the psychological evaluation. The new case plan also reiterated and expanded on many of the initial items, including the requirements for secure, safe, and stable housing. The county also referred mother for individual therapy.

Mother began therapy in July 2025. Mother also began participating in parenting education and coaching, which included a specific focus on the child's history of absconding. The service provider recognized some parenting strengths, but also detailed concerns about mother not taking responsibility for the child's removal. The provider also noted multiple instances of mother leaving the child unsupervised outside even when a parenting-education worker was present.

Mother participated in weekly supervised visitation with the child. Despite the county's ongoing concerns, mother began unsupervised visitations in early 2025 and a trial home visit starting in August 2025. In a little over a month, the county documented that the child absconded or was left unsupervised on four separate occasions. After the fourth incident, the county ended the trial-home visit. In contrast, the child never tried to abscond while in foster care from August 2024 to August 2025, or again after he was returned to foster care at the end of September 2025.

In November 2025, the county filed a petition to terminate mother's parental rights. The petition alleged three statutory grounds for termination: failure to comply with parental duties, palpable unfitness to parent, and the county's reasonable efforts have failed to correct the conditions that led to the child's out-of-home placement. *See* Minn. Stat. § 260C.301, subd. 1(b)(2), (3), (4) (2024). The district court conducted a two-day trial on

the petition, received 89 exhibits, and heard testimony from mother, two child-protection case managers, the child's foster mother, mother's grandmother, and the guardian ad litem.

Following trial, the district court issued an order terminating mother's parental rights. The court made detailed findings recounting the county's long involvement with the family, noting the loving relationship between mother and the child, discussing the child's significant needs, and recognizing the pattern of the child absconding from mother. The district court determined that the county made reasonable efforts to reunite the family, that the county proved all three statutory grounds for termination, and that termination is in the child's best interests, and it ordered termination of mother's parental rights.

Mother appeals.

### **DECISION**

As relevant here, a district court may order the involuntary termination of parental rights if “(1) at least one statutory ground for termination is supported by clear and convincing evidence, (2) the county made reasonable efforts to reunite the family, and (3) termination is in the child's best interests.” *In re Welfare of Child of J.H.*, 968 N.W.2d 593, 600 (Minn. App. 2021), *rev. denied* (Minn. Dec. 6, 2021). The county bears the burden of proving grounds for termination by clear and convincing evidence. *See In re Welfare of Child of H.G.D.*, 962 N.W.2d 861, 870 (Minn. 2021).

On appeal from a termination of parental rights, we review a district court's findings of fact for clear error. *In re Welfare of Child. of J.R.B.*, 805 N.W.2d 895, 901 (Minn. App. 2011), *rev. denied* (Minn. Jan. 6, 2012). We review the court's determination that a statutory basis for termination exists for an abuse of discretion. *J.H.*, 968 N.W.2d at 600.

**I. The district court did not abuse its discretion by determining that the county made reasonable efforts to reunite the family.**

Mother principally challenges the district court's determination that the county made reasonable efforts to reunite the family. We review the district court's factual findings detailing the efforts that a county undertook to reunify a family for clear error. *In re Welfare of Children of J.C.L.*, 958 N.W.2d 653, 658 (Minn. App. 2021), *rev. denied* (Minn. May 18, 2021). The district court's determination that the county's efforts were reasonable is reviewed for an abuse of discretion. *In re Welfare of Child of D.L.D.*, 865 N.W.2d 315, 321-23 (Minn. App. 2015), *rev. denied* (Minn. July 20, 2015).

In evaluating the reasonableness of the county's reunification 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 must also consider how long the county was involved and the quality of the county’s efforts. *In re Welfare of Child of A.M.C.*, 920 N.W.2d 648, 655 (Minn. App. 2018). But what constitutes “reasonable efforts” depends on the facts of each case. *Id.* at 663.

Mother’s reasonable-efforts argument appears to have two parts, challenging the district court’s: (1) findings as to the reunification efforts that the county undertook, and (2) determination that the county’s efforts were reasonable. We address each in turn.

First, mother argues that the district court clearly erred by finding that the county’s reunification efforts included “[c]ommunication with [her] service providers.” Mother contends that the evidence showed the case manager who worked with the family in mid-2025 had only a 15-minute discussion with the therapist’s scheduler and a few emails with the therapist. Mother also cites testimony of the case manager who did not send the therapist the report from mother’s psychological evaluation. While this testimony may not reflect the level of communication that mother believes was appropriate, it does reflect communication. The record also reflects that the case manager communicated with the service that provided mother’s parenting education. With record evidence supporting the district court’s finding that the county communicated with mother’s service providers, the finding is not clearly erroneous. *See J.C.L.*, 958 N.W.2d at 658.

Second, mother challenges the district court’s determination that the county made reasonable reunification efforts. Mother contends that the county failed to provide “significant coordination of services” because mother’s therapist did not receive the

psychological evaluation report, which meant that the report could not be used to address the principal concern that led to the child's removal. We are not persuaded.

The county acted on the psychological evaluation report by providing a referral for individual therapy, which was the report's only specific therapeutic recommendation. The county also referred mother to parenting-education services and coordinated with that service provider to ensure that it worked with mother on her ability to supervise the child and to prevent him from absconding.

Mother's contentions about the county's efforts overlook the numerous types of services that the county provided. In addressing reasonable efforts, the district court found that the county provided more than 20 different services, including a GPS tracking device for the child; an alarm system for the child's safety; referrals for mother's psychological evaluation, parenting education, and individual therapy; housing resources; various types of transportation support; and communication with service providers for the child and mother. With the exception of communication with the service providers, mother does not dispute the findings related to the other 19 services that the county provided. Mother also does not dispute that many of the services were focused on helping mother to safely supervise the child and prevent him from absconding. The possibility that the county could have done something more with the evaluation report does not indicate that the district court abused its discretion in determining that the county's reunification efforts were reasonable.

**II. The district court did not abuse its discretion by determining that a statutory ground for termination exists.**

Mother challenges the district court's determination that the county proved grounds for termination. We apply an abuse-of-discretion standard of review to a determination that a statutory ground for termination exists. *J.H.*, 968 N.W.2d at 600.

The district court determined that the county proved all three of the grounds that it alleged for terminating mother's parental rights: mother has neglected her parental duties, mother is palpably unfit to parent, and the county's reasonable efforts have failed to correct the conditions leading to the child's out-of-home placement. *See* Minn. Stat. § 260C.301, subd. 1(b)(2), (3), (4). Because we only need to affirm one statutory basis to affirm a termination of parental rights, *J.R.B.*, 805 N.W.2d at 906, we focus on the last of these.

A district court may involuntarily terminate parental rights if, "following the child's placement out of the home, 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). A parent's compliance with a case plan is relevant to determining whether reasonable efforts have failed, but "[t]he critical issue is . . . whether the parent is presently able to assume the responsibilities of caring for the child." *In re Welfare of Child of J.K.T.*, 814 N.W.2d 76, 89 (Minn. App. 2012).

The district court noted the county's numerous efforts to help mother address the principal concern underlying the child's out-of-home placement—her inability to provide him appropriate supervision to keep him safe. After careful consideration, the court determined that, despite those prolonged efforts, mother remained incapable of providing

appropriate supervision for the child. Mother continued to leave the child unattended and failed to exercise precautions to prevent the child from absconding.

Mother contends that the “lack of case coordination”—the focus of her reasonable-efforts argument—also undermines the district court’s finding that mother is unable to appropriately supervise the child. In short, mother’s argument as to statutory grounds is contingent on her reasonable-efforts argument. Accordingly, it fails for the same reasons.

Mother’s argument recognizes that the principal concern leading to the child’s out-of-home placement was her inability to supervise him and keep him safe. Our review of the record confirms strong evidentiary support for the district court’s finding that this concern was not corrected. The record demonstrates that the county provided numerous services aimed at ensuring appropriate supervision, preventing the child from absconding, and finding him if he did. Despite these services, the county documented four supervision shortfalls during the child’s one-month trial home visit. Because the record supports the findings about mother’s inability to safely supervise the child, the district court did not abuse its discretion by determining that this statutory ground for termination exists.

### **III. The district court did not abuse its discretion by determining that termination is in the child’s best interests.**

Mother challenges the district court’s determination that it is in the child’s best interests to terminate mother’s parental rights. We review a best-interests determination for an abuse of discretion. *J.H.*, 968 N.W.2d at 600.

To determine whether termination of parental rights is in a child’s best interests, a district court must analyze “(1) the child’s interests in preserving the parent-child

relationship; (2) the parent’s interests in preserving the parent-child relationship; and (3) any competing interests of the child.” *In re Welfare of Child of R.V.M.*, 8 N.W.3d 680, 696 (Minn. App. 2024) (quotation omitted), *rev. denied* (Minn. July 19, 2024). “Competing interests include health considerations, a stable environment, and the child’s preference.” *Id.* at 697 (quotation omitted).

Mother appears to contend that the county’s failure to provide reasonable efforts means that termination was not in the child’s best interests. As discussed above, mother’s reasonable-efforts argument fails. So does this related best-interests argument.

Moreover, our careful review of the record confirms that the district court’s best-interests determination has strong support. The court noted that the guardian ad litem testified that termination is in the child’s best interests. The district court also carefully addressed the pertinent considerations in weighing the child’s best interests. The court acknowledged the “loving, affectionate” relationship between mother and the child, that the child “has been observed seeking [mother] out for comfort,” and that mother also loves the child “very much.” But the district court found that, “[d]espite this loving relationship, Mother lacks the skills necessary to meet [the child’s] most basic needs for safety and stability.” The court reasoned that the child’s “need for a caregiver who can meet his basic needs [for] safety, stability, and security, along with the special needs made necessary by his . . . diagnosis, outweighs the benefit of preserving the parent-child relationship.” On this record, the district court did not abuse its discretion by determining that termination is in the child’s best interests.

**Affirmed.**