



April 5, 2022

The Honorable Julie Rosen
Senate Finance Committee
2113 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Rosen and Members of the Finance Committee:

This letter is written in response to Senate File 2673. As SF 2673 advances, I encourage the Minnesota Senate to consider incorporating the Minnesota Department of Human Rights' supplemental budget requests, so we can help strengthen civil rights protections and enforcement in Minnesota.

As the state's civil rights enforcement agency, the Minnesota Department of Human Rights is responsible for investigating instances of discrimination, as well as working with over 3,000 state contractors across Minnesota to ensure men and women are compensated equally for equal work and that contractors are making good faith efforts towards workforce hiring goals. The staff at the Minnesota Department of Human Rights work hard every day on behalf of Minnesotans, and the following supplemental budget requests reflect community-driven priorities that will strengthen the department's ability to help ensure that Minnesotans can lead lives of dignity, free from discrimination.

- **Increase the Department's Investigative Capacity**
Minnesotans deserve a strong civil rights agency to independently investigate any potential concerns with discrimination. This \$492,000 investment in fiscal year 2023, and \$922,000 in fiscal years 2024-25, allows MDHR to hire additional investigators to decrease caseloads for investigators so discrimination investigations can be done as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- **Improve the State's Ability to Track Bias or Hate Incidents**
The state needs better data collection in order to take actionable steps to address acts of bias or hate. This \$388,000 investment in fiscal year 2023, and \$486,000 in fiscal years 2024-25 allows MDHR to track, analyze, and report on bias or hate incidents, as well as collaborate with community-based groups who conduct their own data collection.
- **Fund the Bias Response & Community Equity Outreach Team**
Nonprofits, local governments, law enforcement, schools, and businesses all have a role to play in creating safe and welcoming spaces for Minnesotans. This \$1,185,000 investment in fiscal year 2023, and \$2,002,000 in fiscal years 2024-25 would build a team fully equipped to create long-term partnerships across communities to help curb hate and discrimination from happening. This team

would also be equipped to immediately respond to hate incidents after they occur by providing culturally competent support to local communities. This will help build welcoming communities and ensure Minnesotans who experience incidents of hate are heard and supported.

- **Strengthen the Department’s Enforcement Capabilities in State Contracting**

Minnesota thrives when state investments are used to intentionally undo disparities and inequalities. This is why the department works with more than 3,000 state contractors to ensure men and women are compensated equally for equal work and that contractors are making good faith efforts towards their workforce goals. The department has put forth two requests in this area. The first is an investment of \$228,000 in fiscal year 2023 and \$456,000 in fiscal years 2024-25 that will provide MDHR with needed resources to help support the growing and changing needs from contractors. The second is an investment of \$250,000 in fiscal year 2023 to provide one-time funding for MDHR to consult with experts that will allow for better utilization of data and technology when evaluating state contractors’ compliance.

As Senate File 2673 advances, I encourage the Minnesota Senate to take a more holistic approach and incorporate civil rights priorities into its omnibus bill. In order to respond to today’s needs, Minnesota should have a strong civil rights enforcement agency so that its residents can lead lives of dignity, free from discrimination.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Lucero
Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Human Rights