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March 12, 2023

Minnesota Senate Committee on Energy, Utilities, Environment, and Climate
3109 Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Avenue W, Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Frentz and Committee Members,

Fresh Energy is a 30-year-old, Minnesota-based nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization. We work to shape and drive bold policy solutions to achieve equitable carbon-neutral economies. Fresh Energy is pleased to support Senator Xiong's Senate File 2024 to fund and expand the state weatherization's activities, including funding of pre-weatherization activities for income-eligible households, and establishing a workforce training grant program.

Establishing this program will go far towards decreasing the energy burden—the percentage of monthly income that a household spends on energy costs—for Minnesotans across the state. This is especially impactful at a time when energy costs continue to rise. Additionally, it will set up our state's workforce for success by creating more jobs and training opportunities within the energy efficiency sector, which encompasses weatherization.

Energy burden is four-times higher for under-resourced households than for the average Minnesota household. Under-resourced households on average experience an energy burden of 8% – compared to a state average of 2%. Some households across the state experience even higher energy burdens, closer to 30%. For these families, that means 30% of their entire income is spent solely on paying energy bills; this does not include other, additional monthly household expenses. These disparities underscore the importance of supplementing existing programs like the federal weatherization program and utilities' pre-weatherization efforts, along with investing in the people who are needed to do this type of work.

The federal weatherization program funds home repairs and energy upgrades for under-resourced households that will save Minnesota families money on their energy bills every single month, while also making their homes healthier places to live. However, the need for pre-weatherization upgrades is a major barrier for accessing federal weatherization programs. Pre-weatherization addresses health and safety hazards that are not typically within the scope of energy upgrades but are necessary to fix before a home can be weatherized; examples include making the workspace in the residence safe and accessible for workers; remediating hazardous materials; and addressing excessive moisture. Investing in pre-weatherization will allow significantly more households, especially under-resourced households, to benefit from energy efficiency programs.

SF2024 helps expand energy affordability to more households; provides significant health and safety benefits; and when paired with weatherization, substantially reduces the energy burden for the Minnesota families who can benefit the most from it. For all these reasons, Fresh Energy strongly supports SF2024, and thanks Senator Xiong for being a steadfast advocate for reducing the energy burden for the Minnesotans who need it most.

Sincerely,

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