

March 22, 2023

Dear members of the Senate Energy, Utilities, and Climate Committee,

My name is Sam Olbekson. I am an enrolled member of the White Earth Nation of Minnesota Ojibwe and am serving as the 2023 president of the American Institute of Architects Minnesota. On behalf of our more than 2,300 architects and design professionals, I am writing in support of Senate File 2295, which establishes an energy benchmarking program for existing buildings.

The climate impact of buildings is well known; as much as 40 percent of our carbon footprint comes from the construction and operation of buildings. Architects can help their clients make sustainable choices when they are constructing buildings, and that has a significant impact; but we must also understand more about our energy footprint in existing buildings if we are to identify ways to reduce the climate impact of the built environment on a meaningful scale.

Energy benchmarking is not a new practice; cities and states across the United States, including some Minnesota cities, have similar benchmarking programs in place. This common-sense measure can help business owners identify ways to improve building performance, which could save them money in long-term operating costs along with reducing the building's climate impact.

The EPA's Energy Star Portfolio Manager, which is the tool recommended in the bill, is one commonly used in jurisdictions that benchmark. That means there is already considerable expertise available to architects and building owners as they implement benchmarking in Minnesota, and that we can examine Minnesota data alongside that of other jurisdictions to understand trends and opportunities. In addition, focusing this program on larger buildings while allowing for reasonable exemptions is a smart approach.

Once this program is in place, we encourage you to consider establishing incentives and supportive programming to help commercial building owners and operators interpret their results and implement improvements in their buildings. We believe that kind of support will help to make this effort a success.

More and more, our clients want to see sustainable building practices, and their clients, including tenants, expect to live or work in energy efficient, healthy buildings. Without taking the step of broadly implementing commercial building benchmarking, it can be a significant challenge to improve our existing buildings. We see this as an essential step to help reduce the carbon footprint of our built environment and move our state toward its net zero energy and carbon goals.

Sincerely,



Sam Olbekson, AIA, AICAE, NOMA  
President, AIA Minnesota  
Founder and CEO, Full Circle Indigenous Planning + Design

cc: Senator Nicole Mitchell