



March 7, 2023

Senator Foug Hawj
Senate Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Hawj and Committee Members,

CURE thanks the committee for this opportunity to offer our support for S.F. 466, or the Frontline Community Protection Act. As a community-based organization dedicated to uplifting rural voices and strengthening rural communities, we are proud to join the coalition of organizations and community members from across the state who believe that S.F. 466 offers a first step towards addressing the heavy burden of pollution borne by frontline communities. CURE respectfully requests that the Committee support this important piece of environmental justice legislation.

Every person, no matter where they live has a right to clean air, drinkable water, and an environment that allows them to prosper, but too many communities in the state are denied this right. “Environmental justice” may not be a term that is used frequently in rural Minnesota, but regardless of the terminology, the disproportionate environmental impact of pollution is also a dangerous phenomenon outside of cities, especially for our rural low-income, Indigenous and tribal communities, and communities of color.

For instance, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe’s Department of Resource Management estimates that groundwater under more than 325 acres of their land remains contaminated due to the toxic legacy of polluting paper mills in the region.¹ Safe drinking water across the state—and especially in our struggling small cities, towns, and rural areas—is at risk due to increased nitrate pollution and deteriorating water infrastructure. And recent research shows that while particulate matter pollution in the air tends to be greater in big cities—with unconscionable deadly effects—the toxicity of that pollution is just as high if not higher in Midwestern rural places, especially during the summer growing season, posing an especial threat to farmworkers.² Meanwhile, longstanding health-care challenges in non-metro communities means that our most vulnerable residents cannot access the healthcare they need when they experience pollution-related illnesses.

These are just a few examples of the larger, persistent trends we see in all corners of this state and across the country, caused by the intersection between pollution and political and economic power. And while we are a rurally-based organization, CURE stands in solidarity with our fellow

¹ <https://nativenewsonline.net/environment/polluted-lands-persist-on-leech-lake-indian-reservation>

² <https://blogs.illinois.edu/view/6367/13739985>

Minnesotans living in urban neighborhoods like North Minneapolis and East Phillips who are plagued with the worst air quality in the state and are fighting against the polluting facilities harming their families and communities. If we ever hope to ensure everyone's right to a healthy environment, rural and urban Minnesotans must stand together to address these power imbalances and regulatory lapses that allow polluting facilities to concentrate in certain frontline and fence-line communities.

In spite of what some opponents of this bill may argue, the Frontline Community Protection Act will not stop development in our rural places or cities that brings real value to the people that live and work there. But it will ensure that the terms of that development in our most burdened communities are not dictated solely by the economic prerogatives of polluting industry. And it will give these communities a greater say in where and when that development happens and at whose expense or benefit.

CURE deeply appreciates the opportunity to express our support for the Frontline Community Protection Act and thanks the Committee for its consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

/s/Maggie Schuppert
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