

March 7, 2023

Senator Founq Hawj  
Minnesota Senate Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee  
Minnesota Senate Building  
95 University Ave W  
St Paul, MN 55103

**Re: Support for the Frontline Communities Protection Act (SF 466)**

Chair Hawj and Committee Members,

The Frontline Communities Protection Coalition is proud to support SF 466, the Frontline Communities Protection Act. This legislation is the culmination of years of work by community members, in cooperation with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Organizers at Community Members for Environmental Justice and the East Phillips Neighborhood Institute are fighting for a future where facilities like Northern Metals aren't next door – and instead, are replaced with things their communities really need: a community center, truly affordable housing, food production, mutual aid, etc. We believe that this bill supports that vision.

Our coalition and the MPCA have identified a clear, glaring problem: environmental protections in Minnesota do not currently take into account the cumulative impacts of pollution when granting permits. There are neighborhoods in Minnesota that have unsafe drinking water, right next to highways built by bulldozing neighborhoods that no longer exist, breathing air tainted by burning trash from a waste incinerator.

When we consider these problems individually, we miss the way they intersect, amplifying the harm done. We miss how someone with severe asthma might be forced to live next to an 800 vehicle depot in a neighborhood with barely buried arsenic contamination. That same person might already have been exposed to life changing amounts of lead – but as long as that waste incinerator isn't emitting “too much” lead, it can keep burning microwaves and USB cords.

This isn't just an issue for folks in the Twin Cities. We've strengthened the language in this bill so that all areas of Minnesota facing forced scarcity will benefit from this law's protection, just like environmental justice areas in the metropolitan Twin Cities area. We don't want to create new sacrifice zones anywhere in Minnesota.

We believe this bill creates a fair process that gives permit applicants a chance to conclusively show that they are not harming these communities. This bill clearly defines which neighborhoods need help the most. The PCA will then work with health professionals and other experts to find the most significant adverse environmental and health stressors in those neighborhoods. When someone applies to build a project with the potential to make those stressors worse, they will have to conclusively demonstrate that

they will not. We've included a narrow exception for projects that are in the community's interest – and we insist that this exception only be used where absolutely necessary.

We are not asking every single project to go through this process and we understand there are some permits that simply do not have the potential to disproportionately contribute to the problem. We have worked with the PCA to narrow the scope of this law to those permits that have the most potential to allow harm.

We want to be very clear: this is the first step and not the last towards ensuring that every Minnesotan is able to enjoy their right to a healthy environment. Right now there are permitted facilities in Minnesota that are profiting at the expense of community members' health and wellbeing. This bill shifts the narrative around permitting to say that we are not going to keep treating certain communities as sacrifice zones. We are not going to force more pollution on overburdened communities, we are going to uplift community agency and government accountability. The fight over the roof depot in East Phillips shows that we don't have that right now. Please take this first step towards a truly just future.

Signed,

A.C.E.S.

Clean Up the River Environment (CURE)

Clean Water Action Minnesota

Climate Generation

Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina (COPAL MN)

Friends of the Mississippi River

Honor the Earth

League of Women Voters Minnesota

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA)

Minnesota Environmental Justice Table

Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP)

Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light (MNIPL)

Minnesota Well Owners Organization (MNWOO)

MN350 Action

Native Sun Community Power Development

Renewing the Countryside

Saint Paul Audubon Society

Sierra Club North Star Chapter

TakeAction Minnesota

WaterLegacy