

January 24th, 2023

The Honorable Senator Melissa Wiklund  
Chair, Health and Human Services  
Minnesota Senate

Dear Chair Wiklund,

As the President and CEO of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, I write to express our support for SF 2, Paid Family and Medical Leave, to advance the health and economic security of families across the State of Minnesota.

In the past 40 years, the Women's Foundation has invested more than \$45 million in community investments across the state, and advanced policy to create a state where women, girls, and their families thrive. With the Center on Women, Gender, & Public Policy at the Humphrey School, every two years we produce the state's leading [research](#) on the well-being of women and girls.

To retain the workforce we need, paid family and medical leave should be a basic right and not a privilege. While you or I may have the luxury of taking this policy for granted, that right is not available to too many in our state. We know from our *Status of Women & Girls in Minnesota* research we share every two years, and from the women and communities we listen

to around our state, family and medical leave is key to the long-term success of women, families, and all human beings, and should not be optional.

This committee understands that we are still feeling the effects of the pandemic that pushed historic numbers of women out of the workforce. Women feel the ongoing impact of lost increases in wages and career limitations from that time out of work. These negative effects persist even as they return to the workforce. We must honor the work of women – particularly those pushed to the margins – with an infrastructure that values their work and caregiving and does not leave their talent on the sidelines.

The data shows: Women are concentrated in low-wage occupations, like service industries, where benefits are scarce, and pay is low. Women of color dominate these fields. Many of Minnesota's mothers are the primary breadwinner in the family: 58% of Black mothers, and 46% of Native American mothers are the heads of their households, and yet their work is not only poorly compensated – it lacks basic benefits. The essential building blocks of economic security and wealth-building consistently shortchange our Black, Indigenous, Latina, immigrant women, and other women of color, and we cannot stand by and pretend we can't do anything about it.

Whole families, not just women, stand to lose in the current system where paid leave is available most frequently to higher paid employees in certain sectors. To achieve economic security and a fair economic playing field, we must value the work and the roles that women provide by compensating – at minimum – her right to take a leave and return to the workplace without financial penalty or loss of opportunity.

Investing in women benefits children, families, and communities. We must do something to remove the barriers that keep working women from the dignity we all deserve by ensuring that paid family and medical leave is a basic right for all people. We urge you to pass Paid Family and Medical Leave for all.

Thank you,



Gloria Perez

President & CEO

Women's Foundation of Minnesota