

**January 19, 2023**

**Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee**  
*Via Electronic Delivery*

**Re: Support for the Confirmation of Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell**

Dear Members of the Committee:

MNCASA is a statewide membership coalition driving transformative culture change to address sexual violence through advocacy, prevention, racial justice, and systems change. MNCASA acts as a collective voice of organizations and individuals committed to ending sexual violence. Our statewide organization has advocated for victims/survivors at the legislature, with state agencies, and in our communities, since 1975. Our member programs are rural, suburban, and urban. Our expertise crosses geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural boundaries. We are proud to have a rich history of diversity in victim services and the largest number of culturally specific programs anywhere in the country. We represent 57 local advocacy agencies, including a wide range of culturally specific as well as Tribal programs. We work to ensure that the interests of the most vulnerable members of our communities are considered at every level of decision making process in our state and local government. Today we write in wholehearted support of Commissioner Paul Schnell.

While Minnesotans are impacted by decisions made at all levels of government, the Department of Corrections plays an integral role in the lives of many victims/survivors. Commissioner Schnell's deep commitment to communities across Minnesota and his ability to lead the resolution of difficult, divisive issues while creating consensus and collaboration are just some of the reasons we support his tenure at the Department of Corrections.

MNCASA has a long history of working closely and effectively with Commissioner Schnell; he is a longstanding law enforcement ally who has consistently showed up for victims/survivors of sexual assault. He offers critical leadership around difficult issues, and has regularly acted as a liaison between community groups and law enforcement at the Capitol, and has played an integral role in the passage of numerous bills that support the lives of victims/survivors.

Commissioner Schnell has been critical in helping coalitions to address challenges that advocacy programs face when working with law enforcement on issues of systemic oppression such as increased rates of arrest of victims of color, understanding advocate confidentiality, and challenging systems responses to victims from marginalized communities. He understands the value of community groups and that reforms within law enforcement will only

be successful in partnership with community voices. He has continued that work within the Department of Corrections, convening regular calls with all of Minnesota's victim-serving coalitions and seeking our feedback as the DOC worked to address the impacts of COVID-19.

During the summer of 2018, the Star Tribune launched its multiple award winning series on poor criminal justice system responses to victims of sexual violence. As the first two articles shook our communities and created a ripple effect of increased tensions between victims, their advocates, and law enforcement - some of which played out in various op-eds - we all waited in hopes of hearing from law enforcement leaders about the need for better responses. Commissioner Schnell (at the time Chief Schnell) was the only law enforcement leader to author an op-ed that did not negate the horrifying experiences of victims of sexual assault in Minnesota, and that addressed the need for the system to do better. The Denied Justice series turned a nationwide spotlight on Minnesota; we continue to be grateful for Commissioner Schnell's dedication and leadership.

Commissioner Schnell has shown visible leadership on critical issues facing the criminal justice system. He is an ally who goes beyond the normal duties of his job and his community. He possesses the right balance of knowledge, experience, credibility, compassion and humility that we need in a leader.

In summary, Commissioner Schnell understands that being an ally means listening deeply and standing with us in times of need. His leadership in bringing communities together and his passion for social justice is remarkable. Minnesota is extremely lucky to have him. We thank you for this opportunity to have our voices be heard in this process and hope you will consider the complex needs of victims/survivors of sexual assault as you make this important decision that will impact the safety of people across the state of Minnesota.

In Community,

**Artika Roller**  
**Executive Director, MNCASA**