



117 South First Street • Montevideo, MN 56265

March 13, 2024

Chair Frentz
Senate Energy, Utilities, Environment, and Climate Committee
Room 1150
Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Ave W
Saint Paul, MN 55103

Re: S.F. 4784

Dear Chair Frentz and Committee Members,

My name is Sarah Mooradian, and I am the Government Relations and Policy Director for CURE. CURE is a rurally based, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring resilient towns and landscapes by harnessing the power of the people who care about them. As an organization, we are also committed to the principles of Energy Democracy, which includes the notion that communities—and especially those who are most directly impacted by our energy system—deserve a voice and power in the decision-making about our energy future. Thank you for this opportunity to testify about our concerns with S.F. 4784.

The energy transition is a rural transition. The new energy infrastructure that we need to rapidly build out to address the climate crisis will be sited in rural places, changing our landscapes and communities. We at CURE are vocal and active advocates for the development of renewable energy, both to meet the urgent need to transition away from fossil energy and because of the opportunities it may offer to our rural communities. We know that many who support S.F. 4784 do so with the same goals in mind. We appreciate that throughout the discussion about how we should adapt and improve our energy facility approval process, there has been broad consensus that Minnesota should uphold our commitment to public participation and accountability, ensuring that all those who will be impacted by these projects will have a say. As an organization that devotes much of our efforts towards helping Minnesotans navigate our permitting process, we also know firsthand that the current process does contain inefficiencies and complexities. We support efforts to address these issues and ensure that impacted and concerned citizens aren't forced to waste time and energy trying to have their voices heard in these processes.

Unfortunately, we are concerned that the language that was introduced as S.F. 4784 uses the guise of “correcting inefficiencies” to do far more. S.F. 4784 includes a number of provisions that remove opportunities for participation, create unreasonably short timelines that pose a barrier to access, hamstringing the agencies that are tasked with upholding the public interest from doing that job, and

ultimately cede *even more power* to incumbent utilities and energy developers for deciding the fate of our energy future.

CURE would also like to note that the “stakeholder process” that occurred over the last few months that we have been told informed this bill did not successfully incorporate the views of a wide variety of individuals or organizations who have a direct interest in how, when, and where we site energy infrastructure. Participants were, by and large, representative of utilities and energy interests. But it is even more notable who was not in the room: no Environmental Justice organizations, community development advocates, and most glaringly, no Tribal or Indigenous community representativeness participated. That is why we would caution the authors and supporters against pushing this bill through without an understanding of the impacts it will have and without much more careful consideration of and consultation with a truly representative collection of viewpoints, not just industry voices.

Thank you again to the Committee for hearing our testimony today.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sarah Mooradian

Government Relations & Policy Director

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