

April 3rd, 2024

Minnesota Senate
1200 Minnesota Senate Building
State and Local Government and Veterans Committee
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Chair Dziedzic and the State and Local Government and Veterans Committee,

I am writing today as a training physician and scientist at the University of Minnesota (UMN) to express my support for SF4597, which if passed would reform the MN Public Employment Labor Relations Act (PELRA).

Our UMN is home to approximately ~1,000 resident and fellow physicians every year. All of us residents and fellows have terminal degrees. We are doctors and are training to be specialists (called residents), many of whom go on to pursue additional subspecialty training (called fellows - like myself).

I am in the final year of my training as a Pediatric Rheumatologist. I have both an MD and PhD degree, and as a physician-scientist, I am currently developing both my long term clinical and research program. I am in my 15th year of explicit training after college, which reflects the staggering amount of time we physicians need to devote in order to be fully trained professionals in our respective fields.

I would like to highlight two important points:

First, we residents and fellows provide direct patient care in clinics and hospitals of almost every major health center in the metro area, and we lead public health and research efforts with the singular goal of making Minnesota a healthier place to live. We are privileged to serve our Minnesota community and are proud to further our UMN's mission.

Second, we are employees that lack the ability to negotiate our salaries. We sometimes work up to 70-80 hours a week but lack control over our schedules. We are faced with incredibly difficult personal decisions such as deciding whether to defer starting a family or commit to having an unsustainable work-life balance.

Our goal is not to highlight specific grievances or desired work protections. We simply request the ability to collectively bargain, which is currently unobtainable for us. The current bargaining units delineated by our state statutes do not lend a voice to our unique needs as training physicians.

Over 20% of residents and fellows have already signed our written testimony, also provided to you as a separate letter. In this context, we humbly ask all of you to provide us the tools so that we may better advocate for ourselves.

Support the future of Minnesota medicine. Please support SF4597.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and ongoing work to build a better Minnesota community -

Zachary Shaheen, MD/PhD
Pediatric Rheumatology Fellow, PGY-6, University of Minnesota
Medical College of Wisconsin '18
College of St. Benedict / St. John's University '09