



May 2, 2024

Dear Chair Dziedzic and members of the State and Local Government and Veterans Committee:

We write today to urge support for SF4316, a critical piece of legislation that would enable cities to better address environmental pollution within residential neighborhoods, which is currently contributing to well-documented health inequities we see in the communities we serve. This bill would provide communities disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution to advocate for the removal of sources of pollution from their respective communities.

Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity (MDHEQ) is a statewide nonprofit that works to educate and activate health professionals to work toward health equity. As medical professionals, we see firsthand the effects of environmental injustices and systemic racism that have led to conditions in which Black, Indigenous and other people of color do not have the same opportunity as white people in Minnesota to live healthy lives.

MDHEQ has been partnering extensively with Little Earth of United Tribes in elevating and amplifying community-based efforts to address community needs, including the ongoing negative health impacts of environmental pollution in the area. MDHEQ supported Little Earth and East Phillip Neighborhood Institute's (EPNI) effort to stop the proposed Roof Depot Demolition from the City of Minneapolis and supported Little Earth of United Tribes plan to utilize the Roof Depot space as a Community Center. In light of recent state and federal findings, MDHEQ is concerned about the environmental impacts of pollution emitting from Smith Foundry on the Little Earth of United Tribes and East Phillips Community and the inability of local leaders to take actions to address and resolve the issue due to current state law.

Our concern for the environmental impact of pollution emitted from Smith Foundry is two-fold:

Propagating Widening Environmental Injustices: The recently proposed demolition of Roof Depot through the proposed Hiawatha Campus Expansion shed light on the East Phillips community ravaged with existing environmental injustices. As a result, this neighborhood frequently ranks in the top 10% in terms of particulate pollution within our state with asthma related hospitalization and emergency care needs 2-4 times higher than the general population in the Metro area.³ In light of such existing environmental injustices, the EPA findings of recent environmental pollution emitting from the Smith Foundry is particularly vexing from a health equity standpoint for a diverse and underserved community already burdened with the reverberating impacts of systemic environmental racism.

Widening Health disparities: The East Phillips neighborhood is home to low income BIPOC populations with a significant presence of Little Earth of United Tribes, a 9.4 acre, 212-unit

1. Ryan P, Foundry S. REGION 5 77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590.

2. MPCA: We have no evidence Smith Foundry polluted Minneapolis neighborhood. Accessed January 1, 2024.
<https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-mpca-smith-foundry-polluted-east-phillips-epa-investigation-violation/600321500/>

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) subsidized housing complex which remains the only Indigenous preference project-based Section 8 rental assistance community in the U.S.⁴The ongoing and sociohistorical injustices to this BIPOC community, specifically the Indigenous community through Federal and State level policy interventions is well-documented. For example, the creation of Little Earth of United Tribes is a direct result of advocacy by the American Indian Movement, in light of the displacement and homelessness of Native Americans that occurred through the Indian Relocation Act. Moreover, the vibrant community of Little Earth of United Tribes and other surrounding BIPOC communities experience unequal burden of environmental pollution including lead poisoning, directly resulting into higher rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma.⁵

In light of such preexisting health disparities noted above, such concerning findings from EPA's investigation on Smith Foundry's environmental violations and inability of local leaders to address such violations is deeply concerning from a health equity standpoint. Our recommendation and expectation is that equitable environmental pollution control practices are needed to protect the health of communities who are historically burdened with environmental pollution.

MDHEQ recognizes the critical importance a patient's environment plays in living a healthy life. When a patient from Little Earth comes to health care providers about their chronic diseases, it is difficult as a physician to recommend healthy eating and physical exercise when the community is limited by environmental injustices and ongoing disproportionately high burden of pollution. Therefore, the legislature has a moral obligation to actively listen to the needs of the communities most impacted by the pollution from Smith Foundry by prioritizing health equity in policy decision making. We need to acknowledge the disparities in health and the environment of this community affects the future generation of all our children across Minnesota. MDHEQ strongly supports this legislation and the community effort to protect its air quality by addressing the environmental pollution being emitted from Smith Foundry and establish structures that address the disproportionate health burden of environmental racism on the Little Earth community by allowing local leaders to hold Smith Foundry accountable.

In conclusion, SF4316 represents a crucial step towards enabling local communities to address equity issues. We urge you to support this important legislation and its swift passage through the State and Local Government and Veterans Committee. Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,
Board of Directors
Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity

3. East Phillips | MN Compass. Minnesota Compass. Accessed January 1, 2024. <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/city/minneapolis/east-phillips>

4. Little Earth. Little Earth. Accessed January 1, 2024. <https://www.littleearth.org>

5. Healing MN Stories. No one is protecting East Phillips from air pollution, notably those who promised to do so. Published January 11, 2023. Accessed January 1, 2024. <https://healingmnstories.wordpress.com/2023/01/11/no-one-is-protecting-east-phillips-from-air-pollution-notably-those-who-promised-to-do-so/>