

RE: Support for SF 4992 and SF 5171

April 9, 2024

To Chair Melissa Wiklund and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

Gender Justice is a legal and policy advocacy organization dedicated to advancing gender equity through the law. We believe that all people deserve affordable access to the healthcare they need, and we work to advance reproductive justice for all people, including the right to have and raise a child.

We are writing to support SF 4992 and SF 5171. Both bills work to address disparities in Minnesota's maternal health outcomes and to improve access and utilization of culturally appropriate perinatal health care and services in the American Indian and African American communities, respectively.

In Minnesota, Black and American Indian pregnant and parenting people face disproportionately negative maternal health outcomes. A maternal mortality study conducted by the Minnesota Department of Health, published in 2022, showed that "Black Minnesotans represent 13% of the birthing population but made up 23% of pregnancy-associated deaths, and American Indian Minnesotans represent 2% of the birthing population, but 8% of pregnancy-associated deaths."¹

Beyond the most tragic outcomes of discriminatory health care systems, we know that people of color, especially Black, Hispanic, and American Indian women seeking pregnancy care report higher instances of having their concerns or pain not taken seriously by health care providers, being ignored by health care providers, experiencing verbal abuse, being refused care, or being forced to accept care they do not want.² Both current and historical mistreatment of women of color in reproductive healthcare is unacceptable and must be addressed if we care about equitable access to safe, trusted, and culturally responsive healthcare for all.

Investment in community birth centers offers a path forward. A recent survey of more than 2000 women showed that rates of discriminatory practices were lower in community birth centers compared to hospitals.³ Community birth centers can offer culturally congruent care, provide case management and systems navigation, and provide more holistic care overall.

¹ <https://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2022/maternal080322.html>

² https://blackmamasmatter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/0322_BMHStatisticalBrief_Final.pdf

³ <https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-019-0729-2>



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With these two bills, we have the opportunity to create the conditions where more families can have healthy pregnancies in their own communities, with the support they need. We urge you to support SF 4992 and SF 5171.

Thank you for your support,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan Peterson".

Megan Peterson
Executive Director, Gender Justice