



March 11, 2024

Members of the Minnesota Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee

Re: Letter in Support of Senate File 4269

Dear Chair Latz and Members of the Committee:

The Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA) and Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN) submit this letter to express our support for Senate File 4269. Our coalitions represent over 120 programs serving victims/survivors of sexual and domestic violence across the state. We advocate on behalf of our member organizations and individuals to lift the voices of victims/survivors at the legislature and beyond.

We support this bill's efforts to improve access to higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. Our member programs serve formerly incarcerated people who have been victims/survivors of sexual and domestic violence and sex trafficking. Many were convicted of felonies related to that violence, such as prostitution-related crimes or for defending themselves against their abusers. A large percentage of incarcerated people are themselves victims/survivors of violence. We know that many people also experience violence while in confinement. The criminalization of victims/survivors of violence for crimes related to their victimization is a profound injustice, further exacerbated by the limitations placed on individuals with criminal histories to seek employment, housing, and educational opportunities.

Removing barriers to higher education for incarcerated individuals is also a violence prevention strategy. The level of support, connection, and community integration formerly incarcerated people experience upon release is critical in determining whether or not they are likely to reoffend. For many people, postsecondary education is a requirement for fulfilling,

meaningful work that will allow them to provide for themselves and their families. The more access formerly incarcerated individuals have to opportunities like higher education, the more they are able to contribute to and be a part of their communities. Allowing educational institutions to discriminate based on past criminal behavior prevents this re-engagement in the community.

This legislation can help prevent future violence. The community support and opportunities individuals experience upon release is critical in determining whether or not they are likely to reoffend. When people have access to opportunities like higher education, they can become more connected to their communities and establish the strong supports shown to impact recidivism rates. We encourage you to vote “yes” on Senate File 4269.

In Community,

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