March 14, 2024

Re: HF 3991 / SF 3987

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and Committee Members,

The Legal Rights Center, and our partners in the MN Coalition for Youth Justice, submit this letter in strong support of HF 3991 / SF3987, which works to provide more tools to the courts and communities when young people create harm in our communities.

As a nonprofit public defense corporation, the Legal Rights Center annually represents hundreds of indigent Minnesotans facing criminal charges. We work with young people and adults and know how difficult the payment of restitution can be for our low-income community members, especially youth. It can take years for people to pay their assignment amounts, sometimes victims never receive the payment they are owed. HF 3991 allows the courts to offer a restorative practices option for youth, where it is available. Through the state Office of Restorative Practices, grant money will then be available for restorative practitioners to create restitution funds that victims will be able to access. Not only does this bill create a means through which victims can access needed financial resources, it also encourages the use of an evidence-based practice through which youth can take accountability for their actions and make plans to move forward as positive members of our communities.

In addition, HF 3991 eliminates the requirement of fines in juvenile court. Across the country, states have been removing these requirements as they can be counter to the rehabilitative aims of the juvenile court system. Court fines can result in extended probation sentences, familial debt, additional court visits which result in missed school or work, and can prevent youth from eventually getting their records sealed.

The policy changes outlined in this bill brings Minnesota in alignment with best practices nationwide and aligns with our value of being the best state in the country for a child to grow up. For these reasons, we are proud to support HF 3991 / SF3987.

Sincerely,

Malaika Eban
Executive Director