

Chair and Members of the Senate Energy Committee,

My name is Andrea Goeden, and I serve as the Energy Assistance Program Director at West Central Minnesota Communities Action, Inc., a nonprofit organization committed to assisting low-income households in meeting their home energy needs. While the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) provides critical heating assistance during the winter months, it does not sufficiently address the ongoing energy burden once the Cold Weather Rule expires—particularly as energy demands shift to cooling in the summer.

I am honored to submit this testimony in strong support of S.F. 0486, which seeks to expand LIHEAP to include air conditioning and cooling benefits.

As an Energy Assistance Program provider, we witness firsthand the severe impact of extreme temperatures on vulnerable populations. While LIHEAP has been instrumental in ensuring families remain warm during Minnesota's harsh winters, extreme heat poses equally serious health risks—especially for seniors, children, individuals with disabilities, and those with preexisting medical conditions. Expanding LIHEAP to include cooling assistance is not just beneficial; it is essential for protecting public health and safety.

The passage of S.F. 0486 would provide several critical benefits, including:

- **Equitable Access for At-Risk Populations** – Expanding cooling assistance ensures that low-income households, including a significant number of seniors and individuals with disabilities, have the resources needed to avoid health risks associated with exposure to excessive heat and humidity.
- **Economic Relief for Low-Income Families** – Many households already struggle to afford necessities such as basic utilities. Including cooling assistance in the LIHEAP program would help prevent individuals and families from having to make difficult financial decisions, such as choosing between paying for food, rent, prescriptions, or electricity during the peak summer months.
- **Improved Health, Safety, and Quality of Life** – Access to air conditioning enhances overall well-being, reduces heat-related medical emergencies, and enables individuals to live in a safe, healthy environment.

Additionally, it is crucial to address the administrative burden that service providers face due to the lack of sufficient funding to support application processing to determine eligibility and to support service providers ability for staff retention. The inclusion of additional administrative funds in this bill is essential to ensuring that service providers can foremost provide streamlined services to households, maintain trained staff, execute the program effectively, and retain employees beyond the heating season.

Currently, many staff members seek employment elsewhere after the heating season ends due to limited job security, leading to high turnover and gaps in program knowledge. The inclusion of more robust administrative funding would enable service providers to retain staff during the summer months, reducing the need for constant recruitment and training each program year. This would not

only improve program efficiency and continuity but also ensure that staff with deep knowledge of the LIHEAP program remain in place, minimizing staffing shortages and strengthening overall program success.

By passing S.F. 0486, Minnesota has the opportunity to lead in providing equitable, year-round energy assistance to those who need it most. I strongly urge the committee to advance this bill and ensure that no household is forced to endure dangerous temperatures due to financial hardship.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Goeden

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