

March 20, 2025

Committee Chairs

Health Finance and Policy Committee

Minnesota House of Representatives

100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard Saint Paul, MN 55155

Subject: Recommendation for Increased Funding for the Minnesota Department of Health Food, Pools, and Lodging Services

Dear Committee Chairs,

I am writing to advocate for the augmentation of fees allocated to the Minnesota Department of Health's (MDH) Food, Pools, and Lodging Services program. As a consumer advocate with a focus on food safety and allergen control, I recognize the paramount importance of this program in safeguarding public health throughout Minnesota. Maintaining safe and sanitary conditions within food establishments, lodging facilities, swimming pools, and recreational sites is crucial, particularly for vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and individuals with food allergies or compromised immune systems.

The program's budget was last adjusted in 2017. Since then, operational costs have risen substantially, encompassing staff remuneration, state administrative charges, inspection-related travel expenditures, and essential technological upgrades. The current funding constraints have necessitated the vacancy of critical positions, a reduction in inspector training, and the deferral of inspections for certain food vendors, such as those operating at fairs and festivals, despite the heightened potential for food safety risks in these environments.

Furthermore, delays in the revision of the Minnesota Food Code, attributed to financial limitations, have resulted in the state's failure to adopt the most current FDA standards. These standards incorporate recent scientific findings and industry best practices, which directly impact food safety and allergen management in Minnesota. An outdated regulatory framework impedes the enforcement of optimal practices designed to mitigate allergen control violations and foodborne illness outbreaks.

The integrity of food safety should not be compromised by budgetary shortfalls. The MDH's capacity to conduct timely inspections, enforce regulations, and update public health guidelines is intrinsically linked to the well-being of Minnesota's residents. A judicious fee increase will enable the department to sustain its essential functions, ensuring that businesses adhere to the highest safety standards and that consumers are protected from preventable foodborne illnesses and allergen-related incidents.

I respectfully urge you to support the MDH's request for a fee increase, thereby enabling this vital program to continue to protect the health and safety of all Minnesotans. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lesley Fahey

431 Wilderness Dr, Chaska, MN 55318

LesleyFahey13@gmail.com

763-843-2326

Consumer Advocate