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March 18, 2025

**Attn: Angie Wheeler, Environmental Health Manager**

Minnesota Department of Health - Food, Pools and Lodging Services Section  
Freeman Building  
625 Robert Street N  
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975

Senator Melissa Wiklund  
Chair, Senate Health and Human Services Committee  
2107 Minnesota Senate Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Robert Bierman  
Co-Chair, House Health Finance and Policy Committee  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor Centennial Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

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

Dear Senator Wiklund and Representative Bierman,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Minnesota Department of Health's (MDH) request to increase fees for the Food, Pools, and Lodging Services program. As a consumer advocate focused on food safety and allergen control, I recognize the critical role this program plays in protecting public health across Minnesota. Ensuring that food establishments, lodging facilities, swimming pools, and recreational sites maintain safe and sanitary conditions is essential, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and individuals with food allergies or compromised immune systems.

The last budget modification for this program occurred in 2017. Since then, costs have risen significantly, including staff salaries, indirect state charges, travel expenses for inspections, and necessary technology upgrades. Without an increase in funding, MDH has been forced to leave positions vacant, reduce essential training for inspectors, and deprioritize inspections of certain food vendors, such as those operating at fairs and festivals, despite the potential for increased food safety risks in these settings.

Additionally, delays in updating the Minnesota Food Code due to funding constraints leave the state behind in adopting the latest FDA standards, which incorporate new scientific findings and industry best practices. This poses a direct risk to food safety and allergen management in Minnesota. An outdated regulatory framework limits the ability to enforce best practices that reduce allergen control violations as well as foodborne illness outbreaks.

Food safety should never be compromised due to budget shortfalls. MDH's ability to perform timely inspections, enforce regulations, and update public health guidelines directly impacts the well-being of Minnesota residents. A modest fee increase will allow the department to continue its essential work, ensuring that businesses comply with the highest safety standards while protecting consumers from preventable foodborne illnesses and allergen-related incidents.

I urge you to support MDH's request for a fee increase so that this vital program can continue safeguarding the health and safety of all Minnesotans. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Michelle HW Hill  
*Consumer Advocate*