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April 1, 2025

Senator John Hoffman, Chairman
Senate Human Services Committee
Minnesota State Senate

Dear Chairman Hoffman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Minnesota African Youth Initiative, I am pleased to express our strong support for Senate File 2031, bills that would provide critical funding for Restoration for All, Inc. (REFA), aimed at expanding culturally relevant mental health, substance use disorder, and suicide prevention services for Minnesota's African immigrant and refugee communities.

The mental health crisis impacting our communities is both urgent and growing. Suicide is the eighth-leading cause of death in Minnesota, disproportionately affecting African immigrant and refugee youth. Recent reports highlight that approximately 40% of Minnesota students have seriously considered suicide, and suicide attempts among adolescents remain alarmingly high. Cultural stigma, language barriers, and limited culturally responsive resources significantly exacerbate these challenges.

REFA has demonstrated exceptional leadership and effectiveness in addressing these issues by providing holistic and culturally grounded mental health services. They have successfully mobilized the community through authentic engagement, education, and trauma-informed interventions tailored specifically to the needs of African immigrant and refugee families.

This funding will empower REFA to enhance their services further, fostering resilience through targeted outreach, mental health literacy programs, and culturally appropriate interventions that address both mental wellness and the complex physical and emotional needs of our community, including our elderly and underrepresented students in higher education.

We commend REFA's commitment to advancing health equity, and we respectfully urge the committee to support SF 2031, ensuring our communities receive essential resources and support to thrive.

Thank you for your dedication and leadership in addressing this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Veronica Rotich

Veronica Rotich
Executive Director
Minnesota African Youth Initiative