

Dear Chair Klevorn and members of the State and Local Government Finance and Policy committee:

My name is Cathleen Cotter, and I am a program administrator at the Department of Human Services' Child Support division, testifying today as a proud member of MAPE. I am writing in support of the provision for state employee back pay in the event of a government shutdown in H.F. 1690.

It is crucial for the state to be there to help children and families – especially children –to get the support they need to thrive. County and state child support professionals provide high quality service to more than 314,000 families across the state to ensure children receive the financial support they deserve. I am proud of the work my colleagues and I do to help kids in our state.

I was especially concerned about them when state government shut down twice, in 2005 and then again in 2011, when the legislature and governor couldn't agree on a state budget. We were not allowed to work because there was no operating money.

During the shutdowns, I remember the overwhelming feeling of powerlessness and being a pawn in a much larger political game. Both times I was a single parent. I carried the health insurance for my children. I was responsible for their housing, putting food on the table and a million other things all parents must provide.

It was especially frustrating because it seemed that many of my fellow Minnesotans didn't understand why the government was closed. In a nutshell, I couldn't do my job because the legislature and governor couldn't do theirs.

At the time, I was living paycheck to paycheck and didn't have much money put aside. I still remember that feeling of pure helplessness today. There was nothing I could do. I didn't cause the government shutdowns but it was my daughters Meaghan and Tierney who were the ones suffering. The irony wasn't lost on me that I worked in child support enforcement and couldn't help my own children.

I foolishly assumed that we would have gotten make-up pay eventually since we were not responsible for the shutdown. I was wrong. It took me months and months to get back on top. You now have the opportunity to do right by state employees and not penalize us for future government shutdowns we have no control over. Please pass H.F. 1690.

Sincerely,

Cathleen Cotter
MAPE Member