



May 1, 2023

Dear members of the SF3035 jobs, economic development, labor and industry conference committees:

As the president and CEO of MDI – a nonprofit social enterprise manufacturer with four facilities across Minnesota in Grand Rapids, Cohasset, Hibbing and Minneapolis – I am writing to encourage you to adopt Senate language from Article 1, line 32.12–32.34. Taking this action would support the skill building and employment of individuals with disabilities across the state and employers in creating inclusive workplaces that are ready to welcome this talent.

At MDI, our mission paired with our purpose makes us unique in the workforce development space. We serve people with disabilities – who make up half of MDI’s workforce of more than 500 people – by offering inclusive employment opportunities and services. Our team appeared before your committees earlier this session and spoke about MDI’s unique position as an inclusive employer, as we have figured out the special recipe of employing individuals with disabilities in an increasingly competitive economy – and we have thrived.

As I’ve conversed with peers across various economic sectors, I’ve realized that MDI has even more to offer our state. Based on our lessons learned, we developed a [Unified Work](#) program where participants strengthen their personal and career skills through virtual and in-person classes. More than 500 employees and outside participants have graduated from Unified Work, walking away with skills that employers are looking for and documented successes that will help them retain long-term employment.

We continue to innovate to respond to what we are hearing from employers around the state. Our Virtual Reality technology platform delivers workplace safety and interview training sessions to meet individuals in a more modern way. And we are refining our STE(A)M programming to help individuals with disabilities develop critical thinking skills to help them flourish in the workplace.

We know these tools are helpful not only to individuals with disabilities, but to all populations. MDI stands shoulder-to-shoulder with policymakers and other businesses looking to increase workforce participation and ensure that everyone can meet their full potential. We are putting the final touches on a toolkit for employers that shares these resources and best practices. Our hope is that this toolkit will help spread awareness and education to help other companies achieve their inclusion goals.

I believe the transformational work this committee is tasked with can be furthered through investment in MDI. I’m asking you to support the Senate position (Article 1, line 32.12–32.34) on MDI’s funding that will allow us to continue our great work with our employees and accelerate our work statewide, amplifying our individual training offerings and outreach to businesses.

I offer the expertise of our network to you as you contemplate the best use of state resources to impact the lives and economic vitality of Minnesota. Thank you for your service and commitment to our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Black". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Eric Black
President and CEO, MDI