



Legal Services Advocacy Project
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
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June 15, 2020

The Honorable Mike Freiberg
Chair
Government Operations Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
509 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Duane Sauke
Vice Chair
Government Operations Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
593 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Duane Quam
GOP Lead
Government Operations Committee
247 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: The Reimagining Public Safety Act (HF 75)

Dear Chair Freiberg, Vice Chair Sauke, GOP Lead Quam and Members:

Legal Aid's mission is to advocate for the legal rights of our clients so they may enjoy safe, healthy, and independent lives in strong communities, free of racial, social, and economic injustice. The murder of George Floyd has exposed the racial inequities we see in our work every day. It is a heart-wrenchingly tragic example of the systemic denial of basic human rights for those with less access to resources. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already unacceptable racial and economic inequities that are belatedly the prime subjects of state and national debate.

While Legal Aid provides civil legal services to income eligible clients and all elder clients and clients with disabilities, the intersection between Legal Aid's work and the criminal justice reform bills under consideration today in the Government Operations Committee is manifest. That is why we write to express our support for your efforts and that of your legislative colleagues to address these structural inequities, improve public safety, and improve relations between police officers and the communities they serve. Our clients live and often struggle in those communities.

Several of the provisions the Reimagining Public Safety Act (HF 75) address problems that directly impact the personal safety and economic well-being of the clients and communities we serve. Second, Sections 8, 9, and 10 in particular would provide great benefit to our clients with disabilities. The Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) – a statewide program of Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid -- is the designated Protection and Advocacy System for Minnesota and addresses the unique legal needs of Minnesotans with disabilities. MDLC provides free civil legal assistance to individuals with disabilities statewide, regardless of age or income, on legal issues related to their disabilities. Our clients include those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and mental health issues.

Specifically, we were pleased to see the inclusion of the provision contained in these sections of HF 75 that seek to ensure safer interactions between peace officers and persons with autism, and the provisions that support peace officer crisis intervention and mental crisis intervention training and police and mental health crisis team collaboration.

In sum, at this transformational moment in the history of our state and our nation, Legal Aid offers its expertise and support for all the efforts now underway, and those to come, to dismantle the structural racism, injustice, and inequity in our society that impede the ability of our low-income clients and communities of color to meet their basic needs and to have their basic human rights respected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ron Elwood".

Ron Elwood
Supervising Attorney