



March 1, 2021

Chair Jamie Becker-Finn  
Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee  
559 State Office Building  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: H.F. 835

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee members:

Increasing choice and access is critical to addressing Minnesota's affordable housing crisis. Unfortunately, numerous barriers to safe, decent and affordable housing exist statewide. Lawmakers must do everything to ensure that households with access to any form of housing assistance do not face source of income (SOI) discrimination. Sections 1, 2, and 3 of H.F. 835, which amend Minnesota's Human Rights Act by clarifying that housing assistance programs are covered by source of income protections, provide one path to reducing barriers and increasing access.

Housing assistance is a valuable tool for helping families remain stably housed and find secure, affordable housing. Unfortunately, current law protecting rental assistance holders from source of income discrimination is weakened by court interpretation. A minor tweak to the Human Rights Act, clarifying that housing discrimination based on a person's source of income is illegal, is required to ensure that those with housing assistance can best utilize it.

According to research conducted by the American Bar Association, families with federal Housing Choice Vouchers have greater success using their vouchers in jurisdictions with strong SOI laws. A study by the Department of Housing and Urban Development found dramatically lower rates of discrimination against families using Housing Choice Vouchers in areas with strong SOI protections. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has found that in states without SOI laws, renters face less choice in the range of cities or neighborhoods where they can find housing. Research has found that households with children and those headed by Black and older adults had significantly lower odds of using their voucher despite their high level of demand for the subsidy. These unequal voucher-use rates remind us that the voucher program does not work the same for everyone. We need source of income protections to address these inequities.

Failure to amend the Minnesota Human Rights Act, by clarifying that housing assistance programs are covered by source of income protections, perpetuates harm that is greatest for Minnesotans who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). In Minnesota, 44% of the heads of households with voucher assistance identified as Black/African American,



according to data for Minnesota HUD voucher-funded programs from October 2019 through January 2021. Denial of vouchers excludes under-resourced Minnesotans, and particularly Black and African American Minnesotans, from opportunities that can offer economic security and upward mobility. This is a race equity issue important to Minnesota's ability to decrease rental housing disparities for BIPOC and under-resourced households.

Amending Minnesota's Human Rights Act as proposed in H.F. 835 will improve Minnesotans' access to safe and stable homes. Too often, people eligible for assistance wait years to get on a waiting list for housing assistance, and then wait years more to receive the housing assistance. When these households are discriminated against by landlords that refuse to accept rental assistance as payment, they are denied the promise and opportunity to find safe, stable and affordable homes.

Sincerely,

Anne Mavity  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Housing Partnership

AEON  
Alliance Housing  
Artspace  
City of Minneapolis  
Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis  
Community Stabilization Project  
Corporation for Supportive Housing  
Churches United (Moorehead)  
Dominium  
East Metro Civic Alliance  
Family Housing Fund  
Greater Minnesota Housing Fund  
Guild  
Hennepin County  
HOME Line  
Hope Community  
Integrated Community Solutions Inc.  
Housing Justice Center  
Legal Services Advocacy Project  
LISC Duluth



Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers  
Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAH)  
Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless  
NAMI Minnesota  
Our Spring Lake Store LLC  
Ramsey County  
Solid Ground  
Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership  
Plymouth Housing and Redevelopment Authority  
Three Rivers Community Action Partnership  
Violence Free Minnesota  
Voices for Racial Justice  
West Bank CDC

cc: House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee Members