

To: The Minnesota House of Representatives, Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee. Representative Carlos Mariani, Chair; Representative Cedrick Fraizer, Vice-Chair

From: Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag : “They are Remembered Forever” Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Two Spirit People Reward Fund

Re: In strong support of MN House File 3055, a bill for an act relating to public safety; establishing a reward fund for information on missing and murdered Indigenous relatives.

Thursday, March 3, 2022, 1:00 PM, Remote Hearing

Dear Chair Mariani, Vice-Chair Fraizer, and members of the MN House Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HF 3055 and the creation of a reward fund for information on missing and murdered Indigenous relatives across Minnesota.

Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit people are far more likely to experience violence, be murdered, or go missing than other demographic groups in Minnesota. Although Indigenous Women make up just 1% of the state’s population, from 2010 through 2018, 8% of all murdered women and girls in Minnesota were Indigenous. Between 2012 and 2020, 27 to 54 Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit people were missing in any given month. MN MMIW Taskforce Report to the Minnesota Legislature

In August of 2015, Sheila St Clair went missing from Duluth, MN. Last seen in the 100 block of West 3rd Street, she is still being sought by her family, friends, and relatives. This is an open case with the Duluth Police Department. The investigation continues, but over 6 years later, Sheila St Clair has not been found.

The City of Duluth, Native Lives Matter Coalition, and Mending the Sacred Hoop have announced the creation of a “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit (MMIWg2S) people Reward Fund.” The Fund has been titled Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag, Ojibwe meaning “They will be remembered forever”. The Fund was formally approved by the Duluth City Council on January 10, 2022

Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag reward fund is the first of its kind in the state of Minnesota established in Duluth. It is a collaborative effort between the city of Duluth, grassroots advocates

with MMIWg2S families, and community non-profit organizations. Inspired by the open Missing case of Sheila St. Clair for the purpose of gathering information to help solve violent crimes, find missing relatives, and bring them home.

“The Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Reward Fund bolsters the City’s commitment to ending the MMIWg2S epidemic by filling an important gap to address injustices and promote healing in our region. This reward money doesn’t bring people back, but it lets people know that there is value in them opening up, to come forward, and share information that is probably terrifying and scary and something that they don’t want to revisit. The money doesn’t pay them off. The money doesn’t make their emotional wellbeing whole, but is a recognition that there is tremendous value in helping solve a crime and bring Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit peoples back home. The City of Duluth thanks you for considering HF 3055, a Reward Fund for Information on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives. We strongly support HF 3055 and the proposed coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 299A, which includes the appropriation of monies to the Commissioner of Public Safety to implement and sustain this reward fund.” - City of Duluth Mayor Emily Larson

“As an organization that works to end violence against Native women by working to restore their sovereignty and bring their voices to the table, Mending the Sacred Hoop has acknowledged that one thing is clear, we must always remember to step back and hold gratitude, gratitude despite all the challenges that have been and those yet to come, gratitude that we are at a place in our nation’s history when the healing work has begun. One way we can do this is by remembering to honor those we have lost and appreciate those who are here with us today. With this in mind, it is with honor and pride that we hold up Duluth as those who are here; those who have shown up. The Duluth Police Dept., the City of Duluth, Mending the Sacred Hoop, and Native Lives Matter have all come together in a powerful way to work to end violence and bring justice to those we have lost. It is possible to change the trajectory of our relative’s future. The creation of the Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag fund is one of many steps necessary to ensure that our relatives find healing, support, and justice. The intention is that the establishment of this fund will encourage tips and information for the whereabouts of our missing relatives, greatly aiding and supporting families as they overcome myriad obstacles following the disappearance of their loved ones. It also shows the citizens of Duluth that we, as a city, a community, are here and we are working together to create change and bring healing to all members of our area. Creating a similar fund at the state level is exactly what Minnesota needs to bring support, healing, justice, and closure to our Indigenous relatives. Mending the Sacred Hoop wholeheartedly supports and encourages the establishment of HF 3055. ”

-Katy Eagle, Executive Director, Mending the Sacred Hoop

“We are honored to be a community partner with the Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag program, an Indigenous led community response to the MMIWg2S epidemic which serves as an inspiration and model for others. Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag anticipates and encourages the growth of the program to include relatives, BIPOC, multiple jurisdictions, tribal and state level legislation. Building on the Indigenous led community response model MMIWg2S families, their advocacy, and Indigenous communities are empowered and honored by the support of our state representatives in establishing the statewide reward fund.

Families are the frontline, the foundation, original Indigenous led community response and advocacy of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Two Spirit, Peoples movement. Families and indigenous communities demonstrate their commitment to finding justice and honoring lost and missing loved ones during Annual Memorial Marches and multiple events year after year.

In our ongoing advocacy, healing walks and support to MMIWg2S families working to find justice and healing it is our belief and commitment that by empowering and honoring MMIWg2S families, their advocacy, and indigenous communities that are most impacted by violence, serves to help build strong resilient Indigenous communities.

With the support of community, city and state leaders working together to help bring closure and justice we can bring the change that is needed to promote healing and resiliency for MMIWg2S families and indigenous peoples. Establishing a statewide reward fund would not only acknowledge but also expand the commitment to addressing the epidemic to include all indigenous people.

Native Lives Matter Coalition strongly supports HF 3055 to establish a statewide reward fund for information on missing and murdered Indigenous relatives in Minnesota” -

Rene Ann Goodrich, Native Lives Matter Coalition - nlmcoalition@gmail.com

In closing, please include our strong support for House File 3055 Missing and murdered Indigenous relatives' information reward fund established, and money appropriated.

Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag : “They are Remembered Forever” Committee, Community Partners and the City of Duluth MN.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Two Spirit People Reward Fund

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