



Representative Sarah Anderson
583 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 27, 2017

Dear Chair Anderson,

I am writing you today to express strong opposition to the budget proposed for the Minnesota Department of Human Rights in HF691, the Omnibus State Government Finance budget bill. This bill is extremely concerning to the Department because it would reduce the funding of the Department back to FY2011–2012 levels.

The decision to fund only 55% of Governor Dayton’s proposed budget for the Department is terrible policy in light of the fact that more Minnesotans are calling upon the Department to create opportunities. The need for our services by the public is growing, the Department has 15 fewer people than it did two decades ago, and the State has a \$1.65 billion surplus.

The proposed cut of 23.8% (\$991,000 annually) from FY2018-2019 base funding will likely lead to the elimination of approximately one third of the people working for the Department. Vulnerable Minnesotans rely on the people of the Department to protect their rights by providing education, investigating complaints of discrimination, and working with state contractors to secure job opportunities. Losing people in the Department because of inadequate funding from the legislature will result in vulnerable Minnesotans needlessly losing valuable protections under law.

The proposed budget for the Department of Human Rights does not recognize the many tools used by the Department to serve vulnerable Minnesotans. The work the Department does to provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities provides a good illustration. The most common complaint filed is a disability discrimination complaint. As you may recall for my earlier testimony, the vast majority of complaints are filed by low-income individuals who do not have the resources to file a legal action.

The Department in reviewing the inclusive workforce practices of contractors has alerted more than 280 contractors about the services provided by the Department of Employment and Economic Development to obtain referrals of people with disabilities. The State Demographer has recently released a report indicating that fewer than 50% of individuals with disabilities who are between 18–64 are employed. This is a significant missed opportunity for the State of Minnesota to address concerns of workforce shortage as people with disabilities comprise 11% of the population.

Additionally, the Department has provided educational events for individuals with disabilities to learn about their rights under the law. A recent event was held in Northfield in which the Department partnered with the Olmstead Implementation Office to inform people with disabilities and their guardians about the Olmstead

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Minnesota Department of Human Rights
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Initiative. In other areas, the Department has spoken to several chambers of commerce and business groups on best practices to create an inclusive workforce and on issues concerning the use of criminal background checks.

Governor Dayton's budget reflects his commitment to provide opportunities for all in Minnesota. The Department is well positioned to provide more opportunities for all in Minnesota to ensure our collective future success. Governor Dayton's budget proposal of \$5,610,000 in FY2018 and \$6,006,000 in FY2019 includes funding for regional offices, maintaining operations at current levels, and implementing a "Ban the Box" for Housing proposal.

Regional Offices: The Governor's budget provides for new regional offices in Rochester, Duluth, and Worthington and additional funding for the Department's St. Cloud Office. The budget proposed by the House not only rejects the Governor's budget but would eliminate \$180,000 in funding to operate the Department's St. Cloud Office.

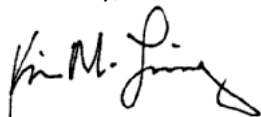
Failing to support regional offices is a significant missed opportunity to develop, grow and leverage emerging and existing collaborations between community, education and business leaders. The ability to adequately protect vulnerable people throughout Minnesota will be compromised as the opportunity for the Department to have face-to-face interviews in conducting interviews will be dramatically reduced.

Maintain Operations: The Governor's budget provides \$248,000 in FY2018 and \$444,000 in FY2019 for the Department to be able to maintain its current level of service to people in Minnesota. If the Department does not receive this level of funding the length of time to complete investigations will dramatically rise and both charging parties and respondents will be harmed. Women who have wrongfully suffered sexual harassment and experienced economic harm should not have to wait for justice. Business owners who want to remove the cloud of doubt over their workplace should not have to wait. Additionally, the collaborative positive proactive work of the Department to create inclusive workforces, support emerging entrepreneurs, and increase civic engagement will be jeopardized.

"Ban the Box" for Housing: This proposal builds upon the prior legislation concerning "Ban the Box" in employment and criminal expungement to ensure that individuals reentering the community have the opportunity to obtain rental housing.

As you proceed forward in budget negotiations, I would ask that you reconsider funding the Department at the level identified within the Governor's budget as the work of the Department touches the lives of Minnesotans in every corner of the state, stage of life, and walk of life. I hope you will not hesitate to contact my staff or myself with any questions. You can reach Scott Beutel, MDHR's Public Policy Director, at scott.beutel@state.mn.us or (651) 231-2795.

Sincerely,



Kevin Lindsey
Commissioner

Copies:

Members of the House State Government Finance Committee
Joane McAfee, Office of Governor Mark Dayton