



March 22, 2021

The Honorable Tina Liebling, Chair
Health Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representative
477 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Joe Schomacker, GOP Lead
Health Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representative
209 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable John Huot, Vice Chair
Health Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representative
583 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: HF 2113 – Vaccine Equity

Dear Chair Liebling, Vice Chair Huot, Lead Schomacker, and Committee Members:
The Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP) and the Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) respectfully writes in support of HF 2113. For the past 44 years, LSAP has provided legislative and administrative policy advocacy as a statewide division of Legal Aid. Legal Aid provides free civil legal services across the state for low-income clients, elder Minnesotans, and Minnesotans with disabilities. MDLC serves as the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) organization for Minnesota, one of 49 other state P&A's federally designed under a Congressional act. MDLC provides free legal services to children and adults with disabilities in Minnesota. LSAP is the advocacy arm of Legal Aid and has provided legislative and administrative advocacy on behalf of Legal Aid's clients and all low-income Minnesotans since 1977.

Our clients are members of some of the communities hit hardest by Covid-19: Black, Indigenous, and communities of color, and people who have disabilities. We have seen the consequences of structural racism in housing, health, education, and other areas lead to disproportionately greater risk of illness and serious complications for many of our clients and their families. Vaccines offer promise, but only if people who face disproportionate risk can access the vaccine.

In the vaccine roll out so far, we have seen many barriers make it harder for our clients to access vaccines when intended. The frequently-used online sign-up is not accessible to many of our clients, including those without access to technology, those for whom their first language isn't English, and some who have disabilities. If a person manages to get an appointment, transportation can be a barrier, particularly for appointments that are available last-minute, as many of our clients rely on public transit or transportation that must be arranged. Many of our clients would benefit from targeted distribution approaches, for example, bringing the vaccine to people in their homes and communities. We have also learned that it is hard to track the equity impacts of many aspects of the pandemic because of a lack of data based on different populations.

HF 2113 brings a set of needed tools to ensure equity in our current vaccine roll-out and in our public health approaches moving forward. We are particularly interested in new metrics that a Director of Vaccine Equity can use to measure the true progress we are making in vaccinating communities facing the most risk. We have learned much about how public health does and does not serve our clients during the past year, and we want to see Minnesota learn from this experience to ensure that our public health tools are equitably accessible and targeted moving forward. We are grateful for the efforts of the Department of Health and look forward to continued collaboration.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of all Minnesotans and for considering this important step to advance health equity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MH", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Maren Hulden
Staff Attorney