

March 7, 2023

Chair Tina Liebling
House Health Finance and Policy Committee
477 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Liebling and Committee members,

I wish I could have joined you in person today. I want to share my story in strong support of HF17, which will establish a Prescription Drug Affordability Board to stop the unchecked price-gouging of prescription drugs. This legislation is necessary to help Minnesotans afford the medicine they require and I thank Rep. Stephenson for his leadership in sponsoring this bill.

I am a third generation lifelong Minnesotan who grew up on a family farm and I'm a proud member of the Minnesota Farmers Union. Over the past couple of years I have been confronted with the challenge of high prescription drugs and hope my story can be helpful in taking on Big Pharma.

In the early stages of the pandemic in 2020 I got very sick. After two trips to the emergency room and six video appointments, it was discovered that I had contracted bacterial bronchial pneumonia. I was told I should be hospitalized but there were no available beds. Because of the longevity of my illness, my throat and lungs are permanently damaged and I now have asthma, which will require the use of two inhalers for the rest of my life.

Two inhalers are necessary to open my airways enough for me to breathe without gasping for air. One of the inhalers is a steroid that recently had a \$411 copay for three inhalers. Three weeks ago this copay increased to \$616, a 67% increase in my out-of-pocket cost in 90 days. **According to the pharmacist these inhalers cost \$939 outright in the United States, but in Canada the exact same three inhalers sell for just \$144. That is \$795 less than in Minnesota.**

Pharmaceutical companies and so-called health care companies are raking in record profits. Many of their top executives have among the highest reported personal incomes in the Minnesota, while everyday people struggle to pay for what are often life-saving meds—or they go without because they simply don't have the money.

These drug companies get away with such extreme pricing because there is little to no accountability or consequences when they decide to gouge prices. Through consolidation that has further reduced competition these companies have amassed even greater power over Minnesotans, creating a grim future for our citizens if there is no intervention.

I'm sure that many of you and your families have your own experiences with the spiking costs of prescriptions and health insurance premiums and deductibles and copays. I know too many people who say that this is unsustainable for themselves and their loved ones. The Prescription Drug Affordability Board CAN BE a critical step toward that intervention to prevent and prohibit what so many of us need help with. We need your help to stop the price gouging.

On behalf of Farmers Union members and myself, I urge you to pass House File 17 and establish the Prescription Drug Affordability Board. Thank you again to Rep. Stephenson for his leadership. Please help us afford our lives.

Sincerely,
Linda Larson
President, Dakota County Farmers Union