

March 23, 2021
Electronically Submitted



Representative Carlos Mariani
Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy

HOSPITAL & CLINIC CAMPUS
49725 COUNTY 83
STAPLES MN 56479

SENIOR CAMPUS
401 PRAIRIE AVE NE
STAPLES MN 56479

RE: HF41 – Essential Worker Emergency Leave Act

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee,

I am contacting you today on behalf of Lakewood Health System, an independent Critical Access Hospital based in Staples, Minnesota. Lakewood Health System strongly opposes HF41 and companion SF 331 in its current form. We are fiercely proud of our entire team of healthcare professionals at Lakewood Health System and their ongoing demonstration of resiliency, focus, determination, and the high-quality patient care that has been given during the COVID-19 pandemic. HF41 establishes unfair, unnecessary, and costly provisions that will burden our rural healthcare system.

Lakewood Health System takes incredible pride in its skilled workforce and truly believes they are our greatest asset to deliver critical rural health care services to our patient population, some of which are Minnesota's most vulnerable. With the on-set of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lakewood Health System developed immediate and robust action plans to face this crisis head on and to help navigate an effective response. Careful consideration was placed on protecting our workforce to ensure their health, and their families health, was preserved while providing a safe environment to serve patients. Lakewood Health System utilized, and continues to seek expertise from, the Minnesota Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control to protect our workforce and guide leave recommendations to ensure we have the appropriate levels of staffing to provide care for all patients.

Since March 2020, Lakewood Health System has documented more than 1,000 COVID-19 related leave occurrences from across its 800-employee workforce. These occurrences required and allowed employees to leave work, without repercussions, due to COVID-19 related symptoms, diagnosis, or high-risk exposures.

Lakewood Health System has always operated with generous paid leave benefits to support employees time off from work and prudently extended protections for pandemic-related leave occurrences. HF41 establishes fewer benefits to protect our employees and requires unnecessary administrative oversight than what our current employee leave offering provides.

- Lakewood Health System allows employees to accrue 160 hours of paid extended leave to use during times of illness - including COVID-19 occurrences. Typically, employees would need to use 24 hours of regular flexible time off (FTO) first before it can access this extended illness bank. This FTO requirement was waived during peak COVID-19 surge times.
- HF41 would impose significant administrative costs to accurately implement. In particular, the retroactive components would require extensive reviews of Human Resource records, infection control documentation, and an assessment of already administered and more generous leave allocations.

- HF41 unfairly establishes requirements of ongoing and unnecessary administrative costs and oversight. Healthcare operations is currently managed with narrow margins and extreme fragility. Unnecessary policy provisions interferes with Lakewood Health System's ability to take care of its own workforce and provide them with the most impactful benefits to serve their best interest and our patients.

Lakewood Health System strongly supports our entire workforce, especially our frontline caregivers and providers, who have been instrumental and continue to be a critical resource to our COVID-19 response efforts. This bill would provide unnecessary burdens on our rural healthcare system as we remain steadfast in our commitment to take care of our greatest assets (our workforce) and ensure we equipped to deliver high quality, critical care during times of need. We strongly urge you to vote no on HF41.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roxanne Hejhal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "H".

Roxanne Hejhal
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