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Good morning, Mrs. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Thomas Lane, and I'm from Excelsior. I support this bill because I'm sick and tired of seeing our state suffer needlessly from preventable causes. As a son and grandson of three different small business owners and also a third-year student of economics at Dartmouth College, this bill excites me because it's a promising idea to solve one of the biggest problems facing our state, our nation, and the economy. That problem is our healthcare system. As it stands now, we pay ridiculous prices and get ripped off. I don't know how many of you have been watching Washington, but last I checked they haven't been very helpful on healthcare lately. For the taxes we pay to them, we get headlines about fraud, waste, and abuse in programs like Medicare Advantage and the ACO REACH program, which was just started last year. It's time to take agency back into our own pragmatic, honest, and down-to-earth hands.

The big picture here is we pay far more for care that leads to solidly mediocre results compared to our peer nations. It's an embarrassment, and it also puts our businesses at a competitive disadvantage. How does that work? In our peer nations, businesses don't have to worry about healthcare like they do here. Their health insurance is managed by something similar to what this bill would study. They are free to focus on their trade and on offering the best product for the best price.

In the United States by contrast, businesses of all shapes and sizes are expected to somehow also be masters of health insurance. Somehow, they're supposed to find a plan to offer their employees amongst a myriad of different overpriced options with ever-shrinking benefits and networks. It's a massive chore and financial burden that makes it harder for them to do whatever business it is they should be doing best. It's especially onerous for small family businesses like my dad's and grandfathers'. Often they just can't afford to navigate the health insurance maze and struggle to hire workers as a result. There's been a lot of talk about labor shortages lately. This is part of the reason why. In a world of insane healthcare prices, workers don't want to work for firms that can't afford to offer them health insurance. I can't blame them. Why would they?

This bill studies our most promising and pragmatic solution to that. The Minnesota Health Plan takes health insurance off the table and liberates our businesses so they can focus on what they do best. By ensuring that all residents have access to robust health insurance at a price they can afford, we gain a workforce that is happier, healthier, and more productive. This is an investment in our state's long-term future that will encourage economic growth, make our state a more attractive place for folks to move to, live in, and start businesses in, strengthen our families and communities, and to do all of that in the most cost-effective manner.

As I conclude I want to remind you of some of the key points of the Minnesota Health Plan. It's specifically designed to be as cost-effective as possible. Furthermore, it incorporates existing federal funding streams to minimize the burden on taxpayers. At its core is the idea of cutting fraud, waste, and abuse while strengthening families and communities. Because systems of this type are so efficient, even after we open up access to care to all who need it, ordinary families will still see significant savings compared to what they pay now. Thank you for listening and I'm happy to answer any and all questions you may have.