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March 1, 2021

TO: Chairman Ecklund and Members of the Labor Committee

RE: HF 41 Essential Workers Emergency Sick Leave

Dear Chair Ecklund and Committee Members:

AARP is writing to express its strong support for Representative Frazier's House File 41, the Essential Workers Emergency Leave Act which provides emergency sick leave for essential health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. These hard-working dedicated workers are putting their lives on the line every day and putting their own families at risk as they continue to care for the most vulnerable during this crisis.

Many nursing home workers have saved lives by continuing to show up to their jobs even as their workplaces became the epicenters for infections. As you may know, long term care facilities represent at least 63% of Minnesota's COVID deaths-representing almost 4,000 elderly residents.

The latest release of [AARP's Nursing Home COVID-19 Dashboard](#) depicts ongoing devastation from the COVID-19 crisis in Minnesota. In the four-week period ending January 17, 2021, 75% of Minnesota nursing homes reported at least one Covid-19 staff case and nearly 28% of facilities reported a shortage in all five types of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including N95 masks, surgical masks, gowns, gloves and hand sanitizer.

While the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) passed by Congress offered sick and extended leave for some workers, it did not apply to these essential workers. AARP urges the Legislature to protect these Minnesota workers too.

A paid emergency sick leave benefit made available on a retroactive basis, for essential health care workers previously excluded from FFCRA is a matter of equity for working families and the seniors who rely on them for care. This benefit could help essential health care workers recover lost wages and, when and if needed, to stay home and stop the spread of COVID that puts older residents at risk.

Without paid sick leave, front line staff in these facilities are getting sick but can't afford to stay home and vulnerable seniors will increasingly be at risk because their care will depend upon workers forced to come to work sick or risk losing the job. With these

dynamics, nursing homes often have chronic infection control deficiencies and staff shortages.

Moreover, research from The Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) issued in January, "[Key Characteristics of Health Care Workers and Implications for COVID-19 Vaccination](#)" shows that direct care workers in long-term care settings are very often people of color, including over one in four (28%) who are Black. One-third of long-term care workers are low-income, including 11% who have household income below poverty.

By providing paid sick leave to these essential health care workers, Minnesota would be disrupting health inequities and disparities that continue to plague communities of color while protecting families and the most vulnerable nursing home and assisted living residents.

The U.S. faces a COVID-19 pandemic now and will undoubtedly face other infectious disease outbreaks in the future, including annual bouts with influenza. This makes passage of the emergency sick leave bill urgent; and the need for lasting reforms including permanent sick leave and enhanced wages and health benefits necessary too.

AARP thanks you for your leadership and urges swift action to pass this important legislation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Mary Jo George at mgeorge@aarp.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Will Phillips', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Will Phillips
AARP MN, State Director