



May 10, 2021

Dear Members of the Public Safety Conference Committee (S.F. 970/H.F. 1078):

Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN) submits this letter to emphasize how critical it is for survivors of domestic violence to have clear statutory protections against discrimination from housing based on their source of income. To help ensure those protections, we urge you to support the amendments to the Minnesota Human Rights Act that are outlined in Article 6 Sections 7 through 9.

As Minnesota's coalition to end relationship abuse, we write this letter on behalf of our 90 member programs who provide critical services to survivors of domestic violence in all 87 counties in Minnesota. Those services include a wide-range of housing and housing navigation services that are central to the safety and stability of survivors and their families. For those attempting to flee violence, the layers of trauma and barriers to safety are immense, and housing is a common hurdle that survivors face in securing safety. Challenges securing housing can force a survivor to choose between staying in an unsafe home or having no home at all. The interconnectedness between domestic violence and housing insecurity is staggering, with domestic violence being identified as one of the top five reasons that people in Minnesota face homelessness. It is vital that we pass measures to help lower these barriers and prevent homelessness and risk for survivors.

Public benefits related to housing provide the financial support many survivors need to create long-term stability for themselves and their families. Extensive federal funds have been allocated to provide vouchers, and other rental assistance, to those fleeing and attempting to flee violence. But there is serious concern that without statutory clarification that discrimination based on the use of such benefits is not permitted, that these benefits will be rendered unusable; a mere illusion of assistance.

Eliminating source of income discrimination has been voiced by victim service providers across the state as one of their top housing and economic justice priorities. VFMN recently conducted a survey with member programs, sharing various housing and economic justice initiatives, and asking for their feedback. There were over 40 respondents from across the state, and eliminating source of income discrimination was ranked among the top five priorities by those programs. For almost half of the organizations who responded it was ranked as one of their top three areas of concern. As one respondent noted, the passage of protections against source of income discrimination "*would eliminate a frequent barrier that survivors we assist face regularly.*"

We thank you for your continued support of survivors. We hope that as part of your final conference committee report you take into account the great impact that clarifying source of income protections can have for survivors and their families.

Sincerely,

Katie Kramer
Policy Director
Violence Free Minnesota

Anne Applebaum
Housing & Economic Justice Policy Program Manager
Violence Free Minnesota