

April 13, 2021

Lawmakers,

Please accept this written testimony in support of HF640, HF1103 and HF1104. I live in Northeast Minneapolis and have dedicated my professional life for the past 15 years to improving our schools, to make them safer and more supportive of Black, Brown, and Indigenous children in Minneapolis schools. As a white woman, I have learned a lot through this work about the ways my whiteness has made it possible for me to navigate the world and to feel safe and supported doing so.

For example, I have never experienced fear interacting with a law enforcement officer. And I know that is not the case for my Black friends and neighbors. Fear is the dominating factor in their relationships with police. Fear – for their safety and for the safety of their fathers, husbands, sons – shapes every aspect of their lives.

And this week, we saw again why this fear exists. This fear is justified, it is grown from the troubling reality of a militant system that has been unchecked by lawmakers and civilians for far too long. I experience this fear this very moment as, night by night, police officers fire tear gas, chemicals, and rubber bullets at civilians who are exercising their sacred right to free speech and dissent, the very fabric of the democracy upon which our entire government is built. This show of force isn't excessive – it isn't even intimidation. It is abuse. We are all experiencing state-sanctioned abuse of unarmed civilians, night after night, as each of us work through the pain of watching another child bleed to death in the street. A child who could belong to any one of us.

This must end. As lawmakers, you have the power to do something about it. I plead with you to be courageous and take action right now to support and prioritize making HF640, HF1103 and HF1104 Minnesota law.

These bills are a small step toward ending this toxic abuse of power and could make it possible for Minnesota to take steps toward a system of law enforcement that can protect and defend the lives of civilians with integrity. A system of law enforcement that is accountable to families, to children, to neighborhoods. A system of law enforcement that could be reimagined as a trusted resource for civilian life, rather than a constant threat to the safety and well-being of ourselves and our loved ones.

This cycle of violence must end. Stand with us and do something about it.
Respectfully,

Betsy Symanietz

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