Hello, my name is Terri Wilder, and I am the chair of #MEAction Minnesota (www.meaction.net) and a person living with ME/CFS (myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome). I am here today to draw your attention to the health crisis of Long COVID in Minnesota.

As the COVID-19 virus and its variants continue to infect and reinfect Minnesotans, Long COVID is becoming endemic. The current resources of the Minnesota Department of Health are inadequate to address the impact of Long COVID in Minnesota and to support those most affected.

A conservative estimate is that 10-20% of all Minnesotans infected with COVID-19 have experienced Long COVID symptoms. As 70% of Minnesotans have been infected by SARS-CoV-2 at least once so far, this suggests hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans have had some form of long COVID, and tens of thousands may have experienced significant impacts on their health, functionality, and quality of life, including children, adolescents, and young adults. Additionally, it is estimated that 50% of people with Long COVID meet the clinical criteria for ME/CFS, a disabling and complex disease that impacts multiple body systems. ME/CFS is a neurological disease according to the World Health Organization.

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, and other non-white communities and low income, rural, disabled, and elder populations. Data on the impact of long COVID in these communities is sparse in the United States and non-existent in Minnesota. Epidemiologic surveys and investigations are needed to understand the impact of long COVID in these communities, including to address specific concerns and needs.

Federal efforts around long COVID have been slow and do not provide needed resources to establish action and infrastructure needed to operationalize any forthcoming guidance or resources at the state and community level.

The funding proposed in the Governor's budget will fund activities to proactively support COVID survivors whose lives are disrupted by long COVID symptoms and complications. It will raise awareness of Long COVID; develop and implement up-to-date statewide consensus guidance for Long COVID diagnosis, treatment, and care coordination; co-design tools and resources to support Long COVID survivors, their families, primary care providers, public health practitioners, schools, employers, and local communities; contract with local media and communications, community surveyors, health care systems, and data partners to increase awareness and monitor impacts of Long COVID; and provide grants to community and nonprofit organizations, Long COVID survivor groups, and local and tribal public health to support those most impacted.

Supporting this funding is the right thing to do. It is critical that these dollars be made available to support and expand the Minnesota Department of Health's work around Long COVID as well as making sure that funding is funneled into community groups providing services to those impacted by Long COVID. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

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