



May 3, 2021

The Honorable Warren G. Limmer, Chair  
Jud. & Pub. Safety Finance & Policy Comm.  
Minnesota Senate Minnesota  
3221 Minnesota Senate Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Carlos Mariani, Chair  
Pub. Safety & Crim. Justice Reform Fin & Policy Comm.  
House of Representatives  
479 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: S.F. 970 (HF 1078) Omnibus Judiciary and Public Safety Policy and Finance Bill

Dear Chair Limmer, Chair Mariani, and conferees:

Thank you for an opportunity to offer comment on S.F. 970 (H.F. 1078), the Omnibus Judiciary and Public Safety Policy and Finance bill. We urge your support for Article 6, sections 7-9, clarifying protections against discrimination for those who use public assistance to pay the rent.

Increasing choice and access is critical to addressing Minnesota's affordable housing crisis. Unfortunately, numerous barriers to safe, decent and affordable housing exist statewide. Rental assistance, including Housing Choice Vouchers, are crucial forms of assistance for vulnerable households. Yet, the majority of people eligible for this form of assistance do not receive the benefit they are entitled to.

Residents wait years just to get on a waiting list for vouchers, then years to get a voucher. After receiving the voucher they then need to find a landlord to accept this direct rent payment. If landlords can discriminate against people for having vouchers, under-resourced families are denied the opportunity to find safe, stable, and affordable homes.

Prohibiting rental assistance discrimination is a critical race equity issue. In Minnesota, 44% of the heads of households with voucher assistance identified as Black or African American, according to data for Minnesota HUD voucher-funded programs from October 2019 through January 2021. For vouchers administered by the Metro HRA, covering Anoka, Carver, and suburban Hennepin and Ramsey counties, the percent of voucher holders who identify as Black or African American is even higher, at 65%.

It is no accident that Black, Indigenous, and people of color heads of households are those who most need rental assistance to ensure housing stability. The Report to the legislature of the House Select Committee on Racial Justice, dated December 22, 2020, states, "The racial wealth gap is not an accident, but rather the consequence of decades of racial inequality that created barriers to wealth accumulation." The same Report describes that the disparity in median income is impacted by the wage gap; compared to White Minnesotans, Asian people earn 94 cents on the dollar, Black people earn 71 cents, Latinx people earn 70 cents, and Indigenous people earn 68 cents. Failure to amend the Minnesota Human Rights Act, by clarifying that housing assistance programs are covered by source of income protections, will continue to **worsen** harm to Minnesotans who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).



Studies have shown that source of income protections decrease discrimination against individuals and families using a voucher. Research also suggests that families with federal vouchers, many of whom have waited years for assistance they have long been eligible for, have greater success placing their vouchers and moving out of homelessness in jurisdictions with source of income laws.

With a long-needed increase in vouchers recently authorized by the American Rescue Plan, ensuring these vouchers can be fully put to use supporting housing stability for families and individuals is critical to ensure housing stability for Minnesotans.

Thank you for your consideration and do not hesitate to reach out if additional information is needed.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Glidden  
Deputy Executive Director  
Minnesota Housing Partnership

/s  
Shana Tomenes  
Attorney at Law  
Equal Justice Fellow  
Housing Justice Center