Good Afternoon Chairman Stephenson and members of the House Commerce committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you on behalf of HF 102.

When I was elected Bishop of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America comprising 223 congregations and 90,000 people across the northwestern part of our great state, our members were responding to my admonition that we be a church that stands with people on the margins – and that is what my testimony is about here today.

This bill, should it become law, will be one step in the right direction of standing with people on the economic margins of our communities, people struggling to make ends meet -- vulnerable to the trap set for them by pay day lenders whose business model is designed to make millions of dollars off the backs of the working poor in our communities. There is no dispute about the business model or the way it works. Yes, occasionally some borrowers are able to pay the money back in a timely fashion, but the real money is made off of many who are not able - and then end up trapped in a never-ending cycle of indebtedness in which a loan of a few hundred dollars balloons into a ruinous debt of several thousand dollars.

Our Christian faith tradition along with every major faith tradition has strong prohibitions against this form of usury, this exploitation of the vulnerable. In 2016 when I served in South Dakota I led the charge among faith groups to pass initiated ballot measure 21 placing a 36% rate cap on short-term loans. That measure passed with 73% of the vote, with the support of every major faith group and I might add, also the chambers of commerce and the banking industry who understood the business model for exactly what it was! It did what the South Dakota legislature was unwilling or afraid to do.

Let’s not wait for a ballot measure, let’s have our Minnesota lawmakers lead the way in standing with the vulnerable and against exploitation. Thank you.