

ALPHA EMERGENCE

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

The Honorable Frank Hornstein, Chair
Transportation Policy and Finance Committee
563 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

January 27, 2023

Dear Chair Hornstein and Members of the Committee:
Re: House File 503, Reintegration Driver's License

We are writing to seek your support of House File 503, the Reintegration Driver's License Bill. Alpha Emergence Behavioral Health currently serves over 600 men and women, the vast majority of whom have spent time in our correctional systems and who are navigating the barriers to successful reentry. Your approval of this bill will provide hope and a pathway to successful reintegration for the over 300 incarcerated persons who are released **monthly** from the Department of Corrections.

Our current system fails. Why? Because obtaining a driver's license inside the prison wall is challenging at best. In 2023, it still involves paper and pencil, sending communications via kite and one, yes one, person in each prison facility to help with licensure exams and applications, and that is only one of their many duties. Additionally, incarcerated persons in Minnesota are not allowed access to the internet to learn and understand the processes required to apply for a Minnesota license in "the world." And, upon release, learning the intricacies of the public transportation system, where available in our state, can be extremely overwhelming and anxiety-producing.

We know that the greatest challenges to successful reentry are housing, employment, transportation, access to mental and chemical health treatment and reuniting with support networks. Without reliable and timely transportation, four of those areas become a much greater challenge and increase the likelihood that a person will reoffend or violate the terms of their release. We can remove this barrier through this bill.

In our work, we get to see and experience the frustrations and the mind-numbing, illogical roadblocks that currently exist. Take Justin, who spent eight years in prison, worked hard to save money and apply for, and receive, grants to have his license reinstated. He took the test, prepaid his insurance, paid his reinstatement fee and went to the DMV desk to have his picture taken. He was told that, in paying the reinstatement fee, it

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was an admission of guilt on his driving after suspension that happened over eight years ago. Justin was then told that his new license was being suspended immediately for one year.

Or, take Pam, who served a lengthy prison sentence at MCF-Shakopee, worked hard to save money and apply for, and receive, grants to obtain her driver's license. In fact, for the first time in her life, she was applying to legally hold a driver's license, an indication she had worked hard to change her thinking and to do things the right way in her new life. When Pam called to be sure she checked all the required "boxes," she was informed she must pay over \$62,000 in restitution for a **non-driving offense** before she could be legally licensed.

Committee members, this bill makes sense. It outlines a path to legal licensure, it provides protections for public safety and it helps our citizens restart their lives. We want those citizens legally driving, carrying insurance, working and paying taxes, paying their restitution and child support, taking care of their mental and chemical health needs and reuniting with their support network.

We all get better when we all get better. We ask for your support of House File 503.

Thank you,

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