UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus   *School of Public Health*   *MMC 819, A395 Mayo*
420 Delaware St SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612-626-3500
sph.umn.edu

January 9, 2023

Representative Kelly Moller, Chair
Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee
509 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of Minnesota House File 55 to establish and maintain an office within the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs dedicated to preventing and ending the targeting of Black women and girls.

I currently serve as the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the UMN School of Public Health. I am also a Minneapolis homeowner, a UMN PhD student, and, perhaps most importantly, a Black woman. My work and scholarship centers Black women in Minnesota and how we can thrive in an inherently hostile environment. This includes the cavalier nature with which Black girls and women are often treated by education, law enforcement, and healthcare professionals. In addition to my lived experience, I have spent a lot of time and energy learning and writing about the disparities that exist for Black women in America. Particularly for those who exist at the intersections of Blackness, womanhood, and poverty, the opportunities for success are few while the systemic pitfalls are abundant.

According to the FBI's National Crime Information Center, authorities were aware of the fact that nearly 613,000 people were missing in 2018 (NCIC, 2018). Missing persons were roughly evenly divided by sex. However, when looking at race, while White people account for 59.23% of missing persons cases, Blacks account for 207,394 (33.84%) of missing persons. That rate is more than double our representation as 13.31% of the U.S. population. And primarily due to racism and racial capitalism, Black women and girls that go missing and experience violence are less likely to receive proportional media attention. Growing up in Chicago, I became aware of my own vulnerability as soon as I reached puberty. Men of all ages catcalled and propositioned me on my way to and from school. I was aware that if I was harmed or went missing, very few people would know or care outside of my family. This is a very present and stark reality for Black girls and women every day. Sex trafficking, domestic violence and abuse, mental illness, and kidnapping are common reasons that people go missing. These women are our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, and most importantly, parts of our community. Having dedicated professionals who understand and care about the concerns of Black women can help bring us closer to justice.

The Minnesota Legislature led by Rep. Ruth Richardson developed the Missing and Murdered African American Women (MMAAW) Task Force during the 2021 legislative session to examine and report on a number of these issues in Minnesota. The task force found many ways that system racism and inequality impact the lives of Black women in Minnesota. For example, African American women and

girls experience high rates of kidnapping and abduction, sexual and domestic abuse, and sex trafficking. Further, African American women and girls are almost three times more likely to be murdered than their White peers. And even though African Americans comprise only 7 percent of Minnesota's population, Black women and girls represent 40 percent of domestic violence victims.

Violence against women is a significant public health concern and addressing this issue aligns with my personal and professional values. I believe that we all have a responsibility to expose and dismantle racism's influence wherever it is found, including the impacts of racism on violence against women. I agree with the task force recommendations of addressing this issue and the inequities found by the task force by establishing an office dedicated to preventing and ending the targeting of Black women and girls in Minnesota.

I commend the MMAAW task force for all of their efforts to address racial and health inequity in Minnesota. I am open to further conversations and can be reached at LLJones@umn.edu. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Lauren L. Jones

Lauren Jones