



Written Statement for the Record
House Jobs & Economic Development Finance Division
HF 4611 (SF 4540)
May 7, 2020

The Advocates for Human Rights calls on the State of Minnesota to lead in supporting communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The federal government has provided crucial assistance to some families, but that legislation excludes many members of our communities. For example, the Federal CARES Act restricts stimulus funds from many mixed-status families; unemployment benefits are not available for many self-employed or undocumented workers; and additional federal benefits have gaps, such as students who cannot file for themselves but also may not be counted as dependents by their families. **These gaps place individuals in vulnerable positions where they may be forced to remain in abusive or exploitative relationships or employment situations and mean that Minnesotans will become homeless due the pandemic, prolonging its consequences.**

As a leader working to reduce violence against women and human trafficking, The Advocates knows all too well the multiplier effects economic vulnerabilities have on our communities. Minnesota can only thrive if we are all thriving. **COVID-19 is a public health emergency that does not discriminate. Therefore, our emergency funding and legislation must not discriminate either.**

HF 4611 and its companion would ensure Minnesotans work together to get through this crisis together. We call on our leaders in the Minnesota legislature to pass the following bills and continue to guarantee that we remain the North Star that promotes community.

The Advocates for Human Rights supports SF 4540 and HF 4611. The communities with whom we work, specifically asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking, and unaccompanied youth, are particularly vulnerable during these uncertain times. Yet, many of them are not yet eligible to receive federal benefits because their applications are slowly processing within a non-functional immigration system. While the law allows asylum seekers to obtain a social security number and employment card after their application for asylum has been pending for 180 days, that system is delayed in issuing employment cards. In addition, people with valid asylum claims were facing waits of many months to many years before an asylum interview—and more than two years for a decision on their asylum case. Trafficking victims are entitled under the Trafficking

Victims Protection Act to federal benefits during the investigation and processing of their case; however, the current administration has tightened the circumstances in which one may access those benefits—leaving bona fide trafficking victims without work authorization for at least 18 months while they await adjudication of their T visa application. As a result of these obstacles, many of the most vulnerable in our society lack access to public benefits and are ineligible for relief under the CARES act due to their uncertain immigration status—despite having bona fide claims for eventual protections should the immigration system timely and fairly process their applications.

Leaving these individuals out of benefits programs does not mean that they leave our community. Instead, it means that they may turn to unsafe relationships to survive. They may be forced to undertake unsafe work or go to work even when sick. Others who may have had viable means of support through businesses or home ownership may default if excluded from stopgap measures during this time. And, without sufficient support, many will get sick—thereby negating our laudable efforts toward flattening the curve and reducing the burden on our healthcare resources.

The United States has recognized the human right to health, the right to seek asylum, the rights of trafficking victims to obtain protection and justice, and the rights of workers to basic human rights. Minnesota has been a leader in deepening these protections and providing meaningful access to all its community members. These bills represent a crucial step toward giving these principals effect during one of the most challenging times facing our community.