

MINNESOTA COALITION ON GOVERNMENT INFORMATION (MNCOGI)
Written testimony of Matt Ehling, MNCOGI board member
House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee, March 12, 2020
Regarding HF 4326

Dear committee members,

I am unable to attend the March 12th committee meeting, but am writing to share MNCOGI's comments about HF 4326.

MNCOGI appreciates the need for action on matters of public health care infrastructure and response, particularly given the ongoing coronavirus outbreak and its attendant issues. HF 4326 certainly aims to address such public health matters, and its provisions include a mechanism by which government grants could be distributed to health care providers and others for emergency programmatic activities. MNCOGI does not take a position on the particulars regarding the activities that would be authorized by HF 4326, including the provision of government loans to - in some cases - private sector entities.

However, MNCOGI would like to call attention to the data classification provision in subdivision 8 of the bill, which applies to data collected by the Commissioner of Health that pertains to the government loans authorized under HF 4326. That provision would classify the bulk of the data about such loans as "not public" data - either "private" data (regarding individuals) or "nonpublic" data (regarding institutions).

MNCOGI would ask that this classification be reconsidered. As written, it would limit access to important information about how government grants would be used to accomplish public health care activities. If the current classification provision remains in the bill, the press, non-profit organizations, and members of the public would only be able to make data requests for summary-level information, and would be unable to access the kinds of detailed information necessary to review any governmental project. The public availability of memos, reports, correspondence, and granular financial information have - time and again - demonstrated their oversight value to the public and the press, as well as to legislators, who are treated as members of the public under Chapter 13's data access scheme.

MNCOGI thanks Rep. Liebling for her long-time support for government transparency initiatives, and looks forward to discussing how a re-work of HF 4326 might be accomplished.

Sincerely,
Matt Ehling, MNCOGI