



January 28, 2021

Dear Members of the House Human Services Finance and Policy Committee:

The Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP) appreciates the opportunity to provide written public testimony regarding the Governor's proposed budget for 2021. LSAP is a statewide division of Legal Aid, providing policy advocacy on issues affecting low-income Minnesotans, elder Minnesotans, and Minnesotans with disabilities in legislative and administrative forums. Specifically, LSAP offers the following testimony on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) sections of the proposed budget:

\$750 Emergency Payment for Families Accessing MFIP (page 51)

LSAP strongly supports the inclusion of a one-time \$750 emergency payment to more than 32,000 low-income parents and children participating in MFIP. This relief will address critical basic needs, including paying for diapers, food, winter clothes, work boots, utility debts, and Internet access. Many families accessing MFIP are still waiting for federal stimulus payments. Others experiencing unemployment have been unable to access needed unemployment insurance benefits or federal weekly pandemic payments.

Economic Assistance Program Uniformity (page 47)

LSAP supports the Governor's proposal to simplify income support program administration and to reduce mandatory monthly paper-based reports for families participating in MFIP. Minnesota is the only state requiring a monthly eight-page packet of paperwork and verifications. All other states long ago moved to 6-month reporting in their TANF programs. These paperwork requirements do not move families toward stability in income or employment. Rather, they are arcane and onerous for families and administratively burdensome for county workers.

TANF Refinancing (page 171)

LSAP has consistently opposed all shifts, diversions, and budget refinancing of TANF dollars. While we appreciate the Governor's investments outlined above – we oppose the additional refinancing of TANF dollars. LSAP has always advocated that TANF dollars must be invested in TANF families for basic needs. LSAP will continue to advocate that an ongoing modest annual cost of living adjustment to the MFIP cash grant would be the most appropriate use of TANF funds.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Webster", written in a cursive style.

Jessica Webster
Staff Attorney