

LETTER OF SUPPORT HF 55

January 10, 2023

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

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

The University of Minnesota School of Public Health Student Senate (SPHSS) is 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.

The School of Public Health Student Senate is the governing body for students in the School of Public Health and represents the voice of public health students. The mission of the SPHSS at the University of Minnesota is to serve as a liaison between the students, faculty, and staff and to assist student organizations in hosting school-wide events.

According to a recent report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, black women face high rates of intimate partner violence, rape, and homicide. Black girls and women also experience institutionalized racism; they are disproportionately punished in school, funneled into the criminal justice system after surviving physical or sexual abuse, disproportionately subjected to racial profiling and police brutality, and incarcerated at rates far exceeding their share of the population.¹ The report further states that sexual violence affects Black women at high rates. More than 20 percent of Black women are raped during their lifetimes—a higher share than among women overall. Black women also face a particularly high risk of being killed at the hands of a man. A Violence Policy Center study finds that Black women were two and a half times more likely to be murdered by men than their White counterparts. More than nine in ten Black female victims knew their killers.²

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. “This task force is a first-in-the-nation initiative to examine the systemic causes of violence against African American women and girls and develop recommendations to reduce and end the violence,” said Gov. Tim Walz in a

¹ The Status of Black Women in the United States. Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 1200 18th Street NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20036.

<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The-Status-of-Black-Women-6.26.17.pdf>

² Violence Policy Center.

<https://vpc.org/press/study-finds-black-women-murdered-by-men-are-nearly-always-killed-by-someone-they-know-most-commonly-with-a-gun-8/>

³ Minnesota Department of Public Safety. News Release. *Missing & Murdered African American Women Task Force Releases Findings*, December 2022.

statement. “With better data and increased awareness as a result of this report, we can move forward with effective and targeted strategies to support, protect, and heal their communities.”³

The task force found many ways that system racism and inequality impact the lives of Black women in Minnesota. The report found that African American women and girls are subjected to high rates of kidnapping and abduction, sexual and domestic abuse, and sex trafficking due to a history of patriarchy and structural racism. African American women and girls are also almost three times more likely to be murdered than their white peers. Even though African American women and girls comprise only 7 percent of Minnesota’s population, they represent 40 percent of domestic violence victims.⁴

SPHSS commends the MMAAW task force for all of their efforts to address racial and health inequity in Minnesota. Violence against women is a significant public health problem and addressing this issue aligns with our school values that “Health is a Human Right” and “Upstream Action Saves Lives”. Living in alignment with these values means that we have a responsibility to expose and dismantle racism’s influence wherever it is found, including the impacts of racism on violence against women.

The University of Minnesota School of Public Health Student Senate agrees 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.

⁴ Missing and Murdered African American Women Task Force. Minnesota Department of Public Safety, Office of Justice Programs. *Missing and Murdered African American Women Task Force Final Report*, December 2022.