



April 18, 2023

The Honorable Liz Olson
479 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Olson and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I am writing to express my support for the House Judiciary and Civil Law omnibus (HF 1580) and my gratitude to Chair Becker-Finn and the other members of the House Judiciary and Civil Law Committee for including key budget priorities of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights.

HF 1580 recognizes the importance of civil rights enforcement and ending discrimination.

As the state's civil rights enforcement agency, the Minnesota Department of Human Rights' (MDHR) mission is to help ensure that Minnesotans can lead lives of dignity, free from discrimination. Carrying out that mission takes support, investment, and resources. That's what HF 1580 does. This letter highlights budget priorities, all of which are reflected in the Governor and Lt. Governor's budget.

Transformational Budget

- **Increasing the Department's Investigative Capacity**
Minnesotans deserve a strong civil rights agency to turn to if they experience discrimination. In recent years, MDHR has been consistently underfunded to fulfill its statutory duties under the Minnesota Human Rights Act. In the 1970s, MDHR employed a staff of approximately 100; today, our agency has fewer than 50 employees. This \$624,000 investment in fiscal year 2024, and \$625,000 in fiscal year 2025, allows MDHR to hire additional investigators to decrease caseloads so investigations can be done as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- **Establishing a Settlement Monitoring and Enforcement Team**
For MDHR to effectively fulfill its civil rights enforcement goals, it is crucial to build capacity for meaningful oversight of settled discrimination cases, helping to ensure discrimination does not reoccur. Comprehensive oversight of MDHR's settlement agreements and consent decrees will help ensure the terms of the agreements are achieved.
- **Strengthening the Department's Enforcement Capabilities in State Contracting**
Minnesota thrives when state investments are used to intentionally undo racial and gender inequities, which is why MDHR works with more than 3,500 state contractors to ensure men and women are compensated equally for equal work and that contractors are making good faith efforts towards their

workforce goals. This investment of \$125,000 in fiscal year 2024 and \$125,000 in fiscal year 2025 will provide MDHR with needed resources to help support strategic compliance for state contacting.

- **Providing Outreach and Education**

Nonprofits, local governments, law enforcement, schools, and businesses all have a role to play in creating safe and welcoming spaces for Minnesotans. One core responsibility for the Department is to conduct statewide education, outreach, and engagement. This investment of \$125,000 in fiscal year 2024 and \$125,000 in fiscal year 2025 allows MDHR to educate more Minnesotans about their civil rights and work with organizations, community members, schools, landlords, employers, and other stakeholders to prevent discrimination from occurring.

- **Strengthening Process Improvement Team**

The process improvement team is the backbone of MDHR. This team's work standardizes the agency's operations, and manages and update MDHR's entire database, which almost every employee uses on a daily basis. This investment of \$125,000 in fiscal year 2024 and \$125,000 in fiscal year 2025 will enable the process improvement team to help our agency's work and database work more efficiently and effectively, which means our agency will be better able to deliver procedural justice to Minnesotans.

Strengthening the Minnesota Department of Human Rights

- **Operating Adjustment**

To keep up with the rising cost of employee compensation, IT services, and other direct operating costs, MDHR is requesting an operating adjustment of \$599,000 in fiscal year 2024 and \$1,125,000 in fiscal year 2025.

- **Gathering and Reporting Hate and Discrimination Incidents**

To take actionable steps to address acts of bias or hate, Minnesota needs better data. This \$395,000 investment in fiscal year 2024, and \$250,000 in fiscal year 2025, allows MDHR to track, analyze, and report on bias and hate incidents, as well as collaborate with community-based groups who are doing their own data collection. This investment will help to generate more robust qualitative and aggregate quantitative data from across Minnesota.

- **Supporting Volunteer Mediators**

More Minnesotans are using mediation to resolve their discrimination cases because mediation provides a meaningful way for both parties to reach an agreement and it's cost-effective for parties. This one-time investment allocates \$20,000 in fiscal year 2024 and \$20,000 in fiscal year 2025 to meet this growing demand by providing stipends to mediators. This will support a growing roster of trained and skilled mediators who help resolve discrimination complaints before they go to a full investigation.

- **Ensuring Housing is Free from Discrimination**

We hope to continue to work with you on prohibiting discrimination based on public assistance status. Minnesotans deserve housing that is free from discrimination. That is why the One Minnesota Budget invests in the Minnesota Department of Human Rights to work with Minnesota Housing to enforce a

policy proposal that prohibits source of income discrimination against Minnesotans who access financial support, including, federal housing choice vouchers, to help afford housing.

Thank you for making the investments to strengthen civil rights protections for Minnesotans. The House Judiciary and Civil Law omnibus meets this moment when racism, transphobia, ableism, antisemitism, sexual harassment, and so many other forms of discrimination continue to persist across Minnesota.

Please feel free to contact me or Nico Bauer (nico.bauer@state.mn.us), MDHR's Government Relations Director, with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Lucero', with a small cross-like mark at the end of the signature.

Rebecca Lucero
Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Human Rights