

**Minnesota House of Representatives
Health Finance & Policy Committee
Chair Rep Liebling
March 14, 2022**

Re: HF 4112

Dear Madam Chair and Members,

Many thanks for the opportunity to testify and give you my two cents on this bill and about health equity and health disparities Minnesota. I feel like I have seen a bill like this too many times during my advocacy of over 10 years now. Many legislators in this body and the senate have created and passed health equity councils before. There have been recommendations and reports. Nothing fruitful have been produced from them because we never get to the production part; always the advice and council portion.

Black, Brown & Native Americans in Minnesota are at the bottom of every pit in health, education, and in-between. We do not need council members to tell us what we already know, feel, and live with. What we need is state legislators to graduate from more meaningless councils to holding both the health and human services agencies accountable for creating disparities.

You see as a black woman, I do not say in the morning – I will have a cup of coffee, a bowl of cereal and disparities. Racial disparities are created by both MDH and DHS leadership.

Here is how and what you can do about it.

1. Ask MDH why there are almost or maybe none now directors and supervisors who are black and brown. Ask the current commissioner why she interviewed a Somali Mayo research doctor many times but never hired him. Does it also take that many interviews to hire PhD white employees? My guess is no.
2. Just in autism, ask MDH even though they are in charge of and get funded to do assessments and assurance – why they never do it. They are supposed to do outreach to all communities and let families know about autism signs and what supports, and services are available. They do not which creates disparities.
3. Ask the current governor or any previous governor – how many black or brown DHS/MDH commissioners have been appointed? And please do not tell us there are no qualified ones. There are plenty who are more qualified. That creates disparities – the inability to give equal opportunities that whites in Minnesota enjoy.
4. Ask DHS why so many black and brown employees quit or were fired? Some have sued for discrimination and won. Ask them why the culture inside DHS is toxic for black and brown employees.
5. Ask DHS why they disproportionately close and shut down black/brown agencies while the white ones are nurtured, trained, and supported. It is all public data and facts, yet DHS keeps doing it with impunity. Did you know DHS does not keep racial data on the providers whose livelihood they destroy? Write a law that requires them to track and keep racial data.

6. Ask the current DHS administration why more employees of color have been retaliated against, fired, or have filed discrimination cases. See data below.
In 2017 – 7 complained of discrimination against DHS; 2018 – there were 22; 2019 there 31 and in 2020 there were 23. Why so many? Ask DHS.

You see Madam Chair and Members; we do not need another group to tell us what we already know. We need you to hold these agencies accountable for creating and sustaining health disparities. The disparities that MDH/DHS create and maintain should be connected to the funding they get from you.

7. Even the U of MN which is a state agency, ask them how many health researchers of color they produce and nurture? Yet they keep getting millions of dollars; why should they do better when there are no consequences for the disparities they create and enhance?

<https://www.startribune.com/minn-dept-of-human-services-accused-of-toxic-environment-for-workers-of-color/572350262/>

<https://accesspress.org/racially-based-biases-alleged/>

<https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2020-06-04/george-floyds-death-exposes-the-minnesota-paradox>

Racial disparities in Minnesota are the worst because those with the power allow it, continue it and benefit from it. It even has a name Minnesota Paradox.

<https://www.twincities.com/2021/05/01/samuel-myers-jr-fixing-the-minnesota-paradox/>

Thanks as always
Idil – Somali Autism Mom & Advocate