



March 19, 2024

Dear Chair Noor and Members of the Human Services Finance Committee,

Please accept our wholehearted endorsement of HF 2666, the MN Basic Income Bill. Springboard for the Arts is a 30-year old nonprofit organization based in St. Paul and Fergus Falls that works with 20,000 artists, culture bearers and creative workers across Minnesota each year. These artists are teaching in schools and after school programs, addressing social isolation in elder care, helping rural communities attract and retain young people and creating the culture that defines Minnesota as a vibrant and desirable place to live, work, and raise a family.

This cultural work, much like caregiving and community work, is labor that is vital to the health of our communities and our state but isn't always compensated or compensated fairly. Like other small business owners and gig workers, artists are disproportionately self-employed and often have variable income. Since 2021, Springboard has been piloting basic income programs in Otter Tail County and in St. Paul.

These very small basic income pilots have allowed us to understand the community impact of a basic income, particularly in **rural places**. We have learned that even a small basic, monthly income creates freedom and Minnesotans use that freedom to explore what shared prosperity can look like. The participants in our pilots have used this freedom to invest in the communities that invested in them by buying homes, taking care of their elders and children, and finding long-term employment, **helping to build a strong rural workforce**. Here are two stories from participants in Otter Tail County:

*"My daughter moved back in with me during the pandemic and all of a sudden we were supporting each other. At the time, our home was a one bedroom apartment above my business which is a yarn store that also closed during the pandemic. I got the basic income starting last March and it helped us get the credit cards paid off and get our credit scores up so we were ready when a house came on the market. Two months ago we were able to close on a house and move out of the one-bedroom apartment. It's small and it's old but it's perfect for what we're looking for and we are amazingly ecstatic about that. The basic income is helping us to continue to make house payments and make sure everything is stable. As far as my business, this has made it possible for me to have products to sell, because I'm not afraid to buy inventory. I'm also doing a lot more community work including working with a welcoming committee in Fergus Falls and working with the senior center to make art for downtown windows. Basic Income is a wonderful program and everyone should do it." – Torri Hanna, Artist and Business Owner*

*"I am a freelance arts administrator and artist, based in Fergus Falls. In partnership with another artist, I make sculpture from found materials – making use of things that are being wasted to make art. I am also currently helping to organize a Summit for rural leaders. I wouldn't be able to do these freelance community projects if not for the basic income program. Before the guaranteed income, I was working 60 hours a week, which didn't leave time for the things that interest me and serve my community. Now*



*having a little cushion allows me to know that I'm going to eat that month while I pursue the things I care about in my work and community. I was born in Fergus Falls, left when I was 17 and came back to be closer to family and got very involved in the community and that has kept me here. I know some of the other guaranteed income recipients and I know it has made all the difference in their lives, especially creating a peace of mind and freedom to create." – Jess Torgerson, Artist and Administrator*

These same results are reflected in evidence we have on the positive impacts of basic income pilots across the nation – data overwhelming points to increased employment, improved mental health, improved child development, and improved overall health of participants.

One of the most important parts of this bill is that it relies on the expertise of local communities to design their own basic income pilots, allowing for customization for specific community goals, across rural, urban, suburban and tribal communities. A statewide demonstration of locally-designed basic income programs will help make sure that Minnesota is place where culture, innovation, small businesses and local economies can thrive and grow. We urge you to support HF 2666.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Zabel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Laura Zabel

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