



Members of the Minnesota House Public Safety Committee
Via Electronic Delivery

Re: Letter in Support of H.F. 2788

Members of the Committee,

Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN) and the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA) are writing in support of H.F. 2788, reforming the pardon process and establishing a Clemency Review Commission. We are statewide coalitions who, together, consist of over 120 member programs working to end domestic and sexual violence. Our member programs provide direct services and support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence in all 87 counties in Minnesota.

We firmly believe that Minnesota must change the way we grant clemency to individuals. Our state currently requires unanimous agreement from the Governor, Attorney General, and the Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court to grant a pardon. This process makes clemency inaccessible to many people involved in the criminal justice system, and is out of step with every other state in the nation.

The bill includes important supports for victims, and an opportunity for their voices to be a critical part of the process. There is a common misconception that victims of crime always want the most severe punishments possible for those who harm them. However, many victims have shared that what they really want are stronger community supports, opportunities for restoration, and avenues for healing.

Many victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence are themselves involved in the criminal justice system. Too often, the crimes they are convicted for are a direct result of abuse they endured. Victims/survivors are criminalized for fighting back, for defending themselves from their abusers. This injustice serves to further traumatize individuals, and has a lasting impact on families and children.

The trauma endured by victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence is complex and insidious. Abusers exert power and control over victims through physical, emotional, and economic means. The effect of these abusive methods is to prevent victims from escaping. Isolation from loved ones, fears for the safety of themselves and their children, and lack of financial stability can make an already difficult choice impossible. As abusive situations escalate, victims/survivors are often left with no choice but to fight back or be killed. The system views this survival as a crime to be prosecuted.

Our society has learned a lot about the impacts of trauma and abuse, and we recognize that sentences imposed in the past may no longer be in the interests of justice. Minnesota communities want change in how our system responds to violence. The establishment of a Clemency Review

Commission will enable individuals with expertise in both systems processes and communities to have a voice in ensuring that the criminal justice system provides justice for all.

In community,

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