



April 5, 2021

Dear Chair Schultz and Members of the House Human Services Finance and Policy Committee:

The Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP) and Minnesota Disability Law Center appreciate the opportunity to provide written public testimony regarding HF 2127, and specifically the DE 1. The Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) and the Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP) are statewide projects of Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid. MDLC serves as the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) organization for Minnesota, and, along with every other state and territory, is the largest network of legally based advocacy services for people with disabilities in the United States. MDLC provides free legal services to children and adults with disabilities. LSAP is a statewide division of Legal Aid, providing policy advocacy on issues affecting low-wealth Minnesotans, children, seniors, and Minnesotans with disabilities in legislative and administrative forums.

Legal Aid is grateful for the significant investments in families and children participating in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). COVID-19 has caused significant harm to the State's most vulnerable families and children, with disproportionate health and economic harm to communities of color. Nearly 30,000 parents and caregivers participating in MFIP, disproportionately women of color, were unable to access, in total, more than \$10,000 in regular and pandemic unemployment insurance payments during COVID-19. These parents worked predominantly in hotel, restaurant, retail, temp work, and in-home health services. They have been "essential workers" their entire working lives. Yet decades of structural and institutional racism that have plagued both the unemployment insurance and cash assistance programs have made safety net access more difficult for these workers.

As such, we are grateful for the following investments:

Emergency \$750 TANF Payment (lines 495.3-495.11).

LSAP strongly supports the inclusion of a one-time \$750 emergency payment to more than 32,000 low-income parents and children participating in MFIP. This relief will address critical basic needs, including paying for rent, diapers, food, winter clothes, work boots, utility debts, and Internet access.

Ongoing MFIP COLA (lines 10.12-10.14)

LSAP is deeply grateful for the inclusion of a modest cost of living adjustment to the MFIP cash grant. A COLA is one of the best and most appropriate uses of TANF dollars because an ongoing COLA is also the only way states are avoiding the years of cash grant stagnancy that Minnesota families have experienced.

Economic Assistance Program Uniformity (Article 1)

LSAP stands in strong support of the effort to simplify public benefits program administration and reduce mandatory monthly paper-based reports for families participating in MFIP.

Minnesota is the only state requiring a monthly eight-page packet of paperwork and verifications. All other states long ago moved to 6-month reporting in their TANF programs. These paperwork requirements do not move families toward stability in income or employment. Rather, they are arcane and onerous for families and administratively burdensome for county workers.

SNAP Income Limit Adjustment (lines 5.2-5.7)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest federal nutrition assistance program and the first line of defense against hunger in Minnesota. Minnesota has the option to increase the gross income threshold in SNAP from 165% to 200% of federal poverty, which is then funded by the federal program. This change will help thousands of low-income working Minnesotans who are often missing SNAP eligibility by a few hundred dollars in earnings.

Legal Aid and the Minnesota Disability Law Center are grateful for the investments in HF 2127 to the PCA Program. The PCA program provides essential supports to thousands of Minnesotans to live in their homes and communities. We believe investment in the PCA program is a racial equity issue, as many of the people who work as PCAs are people (and women) of color, as are many of the program participants. Specifically we are grateful for the following investments:

PCA/CFSS Rate Framework (Article 6, Sections 19-21, 26)

The PCA program has long been in need of substantial investment, particularly a framework to ensure that rates track changes in the broader economy over time and can keep up with comparable wages and living costs. When we haven't done this, we've seen significant workforce shortages. This framework is an important step to investing in this important program.

PCA Parent/Spouse Pay (Article 6, Section 28)

This temporary change during the pandemic has been incredibly helpful to families during the Covid-19 pandemic and extending this until CFSS is implemented will ensure families continue to access this flexibility.

We are also grateful for the inclusion of the workforce contract ratification and rate increase. As budget negotiations continue, we hope you will consider proposals to ensure informed choice and informed decisionmaking in disability services (HF 1347) and restoring community access to the PCA program (HF 1431). We urge you to consider changes to Article 6, Section 27 to include housing financed by tax credits as eligible service providers (lines 200.25-2013).

We sincerely appreciate your partnership and consideration.

Sincerely,



Jessica Webster
Staff Attorney



Maren Hulden
Staff Attorney