

Dear Chair Niska and the members of the Committee,

My name is Betsy Whirley. I have been a public health nurse for Itasca County for 22 years and am a member of AFSCME Local 580. I write today in opposition to HF4.

I want to first say that I understand the desire to give money back to taxpayers. Times are tough, and it is getting harder for people to make ends meet. However, I think that putting such a tough restraint on the use of public funds in the event of a surplus is not the answer.

As a public health nurse, I focus on preventing disease and promoting health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our community turned to local public health nurses for testing and vaccines. We were pushed to our limit, but we served our residents and kept people alive.

The work that we do is partially funded by grants from the state, and we cannot afford any effort that may have a negative impact on these funds. Penning us into a system where we cannot put money into a budget reserve imperils our ability to respond to the needs of the public. This is especially important now, as it is unclear what federal assistance in the future will look like.

At the county level, we are chronically understaffed. That is especially true in rural Minnesota. I'm concerned that the goal of HF4 will create even more workforce and service reductions. Dollars that stay at the government level have more far-reaching effects than they do given to individuals. Collectively, we can help provide high quality services for our residents.

We need flexibility and stability in our state's budget, and HF4 could take that away. There have been checks given to taxpayers previously, and I'm not opposed to doing that in the future. What I am opposed to is a law that would lock us into a set system with no opportunity to adjust to fiscal realities. Because of that, I respectfully urge you to oppose HF4.

Sincerely,

Betsy Whirley