



February 27, 2023

Members of the Minnesota State Legislature
Via Electronic Delivery

Re: Letter in Support of H.F. 226 – Prosecutor Initiated Sentence Adjustment

Members of the Minnesota State Legislature,

Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN) and the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA) are writing in support of H.F. 226 – Prosecutor Initiated Sentence Adjustment. We are statewide coalitions who, together, consist of over 120 member programs working to end relationship abuse. Our member programs provide direct services and support to victim/survivors of domestic and sexual violence in all 87 counties in Minnesota.

It is not uncommon for victim/survivors to find themselves entangled within the criminal legal system. Many victims will not report their abuse to law enforcement, and when they do, they sometimes face being charged themselves. We know that people who experience domestic violence or trafficking are at a higher risk of committing an offense – often in defense of their own safety. When our criminal and legal system chooses to arrest, prosecute and incarcerate a victim-survivor who committed a crime related to their abuse, they further perpetuate that victim's pain.

Domestic violence is a cycle of abuse that often affects every aspect of a victim/survivor's life – including their interactions and involvement within the legal system. The relationship between criminal behavior and a victim/survivor's history of abuse is almost always closely connected. In our work we see how victims are forced to steal, participate in group crimes, take responsibility for an abuser's crime, or commit a crime against their abuser – all of which are forms of survival for the victim/survivor. Through interviews with 62 incarcerated Native American women at Shakopee correctional facility, all but one of those women described their extensive histories of violence and abuse prior to their incarceration. It is apparent that many of those who are imprisoned have histories of violence. If we want to end cycles of violence and criminal justice system involvement, it is imperative that we address this issue – VFMN and MNCASA believe that HF 226 is a good start.

We recognize that sentences imposed in the past may no longer be in the interest of justice, including what may be wanted by someone victimized by the crime. This legislation takes a step toward providing some support to victim/survivors by allowing locally elected prosecutors to recommend prison sentences for judicial review and downward adjustment based on the input of victims. Victim/survivors often lean toward criminal legal system processes that prioritize rehabilitation over punishment.

We urge you to support H.F. 226 and provide this important remedy for sentences that no longer make sense for anyone involved.



Sincerely,

Guadalupe Lopez
Executive Director
Violence Free Minnesota

Artika Roller
Executive Director
Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault