

January 4, 2023

Representative Tina Liebling, Chair
Representative Schomacker, Lead
Health Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
St. Paul, MN

Dear Chair Liebling and Lead Schomacker,

As the President and CEO of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, I write to express our support for HF1, the Protecting Reproductive Options Act. Thank you to the bill author, Representative Kotyza-Witthuhn, and to you, Chair Liebling, for moving this bill quickly. Codifying access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including abortion and contraception, is vital to the health, independence, and economic stability of women, girls, and their families.

For 40 years, the Women's Foundation has invested more than \$45 million in organizations across the state, and advanced policies to create a state where women, girls, and their families can thrive. Women are at the center of families and are often the primary caretakers of their households. When women have access to safe and affordable reproductive healthcare services, they have better outcomes for healthy lives and pathways to prosperity.

When the Supreme Court of the United States overturned long-held protections for women to access abortion in the United States last summer, Minnesota became a sanctuary for those seeking abortion services and we saw a significant increase in the demand here in Minnesota. Although case law continues to provide access to abortion in Minnesota, we know that we cannot rest until we create broad, equitable access to all reproductive health care in Minnesota.

Access to reproductive health care creates economic opportunities, including the ability to fulfill educational dreams, start a business, and grow a career. Without it, women cannot make decisions that are in the best interests of their children, their families, and themselves. Research on economic disparities shows that families thrive when women and girls are healthy and well.

Access to reproductive health care is a public health issue with life and death consequences. Research on maternal health shows people most affected by a lack of care, especially those who are most marginalized – Black, Indigenous, refugees and immigrants, rural,

and people with lower incomes – are at greater risk of death from pregnancy. Our research with the Center on Women, Gender, & Public Policy at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School shows that Native American women are four times more likely, and Black women are 2.3 times more likely to die of pregnancy or childbirth-related causes than white women in our state. Tragically, 60% of those deaths are completely preventable.

Access to reproductive health care is about more than just individual autonomy, it supports community stability. It allows individuals to decide when the time is right to start a family, to care for the children they already have, or whether to have children at all, among other important life decisions. Policies that limit our autonomy and ability to choose our own futures call us to action in support of our neighbors, community-led organizations, and the communities and people most impacted. Supporting women’s self-determination means we trust the choices they make to decide what’s best for their future.

Living a safe and healthy life in Minnesota must include all forms of reproductive health care. When a woman’s choices are free from restrictions, she can determine her own future and has pathways to thrive – with safety, economic justice, leadership, and well-being. We urge you to act on HF1 to make Minnesota a place where women, girls, and gender-expansive people from all backgrounds across the state can thrive.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray rectangular background. The signature reads "Gloria Perez" in a cursive script.

Gloria Perez

President and CEO

Women’s Foundation of Minnesota