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Chair Becker-Finn and Members of the Committee:

HOME Line offers its support for H.F. 835, legislation that:

1. requires a 14-day pre-eviction notice prior to a landlord filing an eviction action,
2. limits public access to eviction action data pending court action and reforms Minnesota's eviction expungement process,
3. prohibits discrimination based on tenant's source of income, including use of a rental subsidy.

We will get the chance to testify specifically on the eviction reforms in H. F. 835, so this letter is focused on the Source of Income Protections' section.

By way of background, HOME Line provides free legal, organizing, educational and advocacy services so tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems. Our main program is a hotline that offers free, confidential legal advice to tenants throughout Minnesota. This hotline opened in suburban Hennepin County in 1992, expanded to most of the state in 2000, and currently averages over 1,000 households advised per month.

This form of housing discrimination is not a new problem. Because of the experiences of our clients back in the early 1990's, beginning in 1995, HOME Line surveyed suburban rental housing complexes to determine where tenants with Section 8 vouchers can actually use them. This study continued for 15 years and consistently demonstrated that landlord non-acceptance of Section 8 vouchers was a significant barrier for low-income renter households finding and maintaining housing throughout the Twin Cities metro area..

More recently, because of interest on this topic in Minneapolis, in 2015 we produced a similar Minneapolis-focused survey to analyze the experiences that renters face securing housing with a rental subsidy. We were later asked to produce a similar report within St. Paul as well. In Minneapolis, we found that only 23% of the rental vacancy listings surveyed would accept a Section 8 voucher. In St. Paul, 17.3% of the rental vacancy listings surveyed would accept a Section 8 voucher. The surveys also included a geographic analysis of where rental listings were accessible for households with Section 8—indicating that when landlords are able to screen out those who pay rent with a subsidy program, it greatly reduced access to housing and also limited their choice of neighborhood.

We continue to regularly field questions from low-income households throughout the state about this topic, ranging in impacts on tenants screened out of housing options straight from rental listings ("Section 8 need not apply"), households denied due to their housing subsidy during the application process, and/or a group of existing residents of a property categorically given lease termination notices after a new owner takes over.

Lastly, this is a fair housing issue. From October 2019 through January 2021, data for all Minnesota HUD voucher-funded programs reported that 44% of the heads of households with voucher assistance in Minnesota identified as Black/African American. Absent adequate fair housing testing, it can be difficult to draw precise conclusions. However, from the experiences of our clients, source of income discrimination is consistently directed at Black/African American households.

We strongly urge the committee to support H.F. 835

Sincerely,

Eric Hauge
Executive Director
HOME Line

Michael Dahl
Public Policy Director
HOME Line