



February 7, 2022

Chair Jamie Becker-Finn
Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee
559 State Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: H.F. 835

Dear Chair Becker-Finn and Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee members:

Increasing choice and access is critical to addressing Minnesota's affordable housing crisis. Unfortunately, numerous barriers to safe, healthy, and affordable housing exist statewide. Lawmakers must do everything to ensure that households with access to any form of housing assistance do not face source of income (SOI) discrimination. Sections 1,2, and 3 of H.F. 835, which amend Minnesota's Human Rights Act by clarifying that housing assistance programs are covered by source of income protections, provide one path to reducing barriers and increasing access.

Housing assistance is a valuable tool for helping families remain stably housed and find secure, affordable housing. Multiple studies show that housing assistance reduces homelessness, housing instability, and overcrowding. Stable housing has cascading benefits for individuals, their families, and their communities. Unfortunately, current law protecting housing assistance holders from source of income discrimination is weakened by court interpretation. **A minor tweak to the Human Rights Act, clarifying that housing discrimination based on a person's source of income is illegal, is required to ensure that those with housing assistance can best utilize it.**

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has found that in states without SOI laws, renters face less choice in the range of cities or neighborhoods where they can find housing. Research has found that households with children and those headed by Black and older adults had significantly lower odds of using their voucher despite their high level of demand for the subsidy. These unequal voucher-use rates remind us that housing assistance does not work the same for everyone.

Source of income protection works. According to research conducted by the American Bar Association, families with federal Housing Choice Vouchers have greater success using their vouchers in jurisdictions with clear SOI laws. A study by the Department of Housing and Urban development found dramatically lower rates of discrimination against families using Housing Choice Vouchers in areas with strong SOI protections.

Failure to amend the Minnesota Human Rights Act by clarifying that housing assistance programs are covered by source of income protections perpetuates harm that is greater for Minnesotans who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). In Minnesota, 44% of the head of households with voucher assistance are identified as Black/African American (according to data from Minnesota HUD voucher-funded programs from October 2019 through January 2019). Being denied the use of vouchers disproportionately excludes marginalized Minnesotans, and particularly Black Minnesotans, from opportunities that can offer economic security and upward mobility. This is a race equity issue important to Minnesota's ability to decrease the serious rental housing disparities that exist for BIPOC and under-resourced households.

Amending Minnesota's Human Rights Act as proposed in H.F. 835 will improve Minnesotans' access to safe and stable homes. Too often, people eligible for assistance wait years to get on a waiting list for housing assistance, and then wait years more to actually receive it. When these households are discriminated against by property owners who refuse to accept rental assistance as payment, they are denied the promise and opportunity to find a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aimee Munitz".



Anne Mavity

Executive Director

Minnesota Housing Partnership

Aeon

African Career, Education, & Resource Inc. (ACER)

Alexandra House, Inc.

Align Minneapolis

Alliance Housing Inc.

Catholic Charities of St. Paul & Minneapolis

Central Minnesota Housing Partnership, Inc.

Churches United (Moorhead)

City of Minneapolis

Community Stabilization Project

Corporation for Supportive Housing

Dominium

East Metro Civic Alliance

Family Housing Fund

Greater Minnesota Housing Fund

Guild

Haven Housing

HOME Line

Hope Community

Housing Justice Center

Inquilinxs Unidxs por Justicia

Laura Baker Services Association

Legal Services Advocacy Project

Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers

Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAH)

Minneapolis Public Housing Authority

Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless

NAMI Minnesota

New American Development Center

Somali American Social Service Association

Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership

Three Rivers Community Action Partnership

Violence Free Minnesota

West Bank CDC