



March 7, 2023

State Office Building
Climate and Energy Finance and Policy Committee
Room 200
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: House File 2493, Supplemental Energy Assistance

Dear Chair Acomb, Rep. Kraft, and members of the committee,

The utilities listed support HF 2493 (Supplemental Energy Assistance). Using general funds, this legislation creates an account to expand the number of Minnesota households receiving energy assistance and enable year-round assistance. These funds are prioritized to help Minnesotans who are not receiving support through the low-income home energy assistance program (LIHEAP) and face a heating crisis or a substantial hardship to heat or cool their home.

However, the administrative and outreach costs allowed under this bill are above existing caps for LIHEAP, which may be a concern. We encourage the MN Department of Commerce to work with existing LIHEAP service providers and utility affordability programs to improve efficient use of these funds moving forward and maximize direct assistance to households.

We thank Representative Kraft and the multiple authors for bring this bill forward, and thank Chair Acomb for hearing this bill.

Sincerely,

Zach Martin
ALLETE / MN Power
Manager of Government Affairs

Jamie Fitzke
CenterPoint Energy
Director of Government Affairs

Joe Hoppe
Otter Tail Power
Manager of Government Affairs

Jenny Glumack
MREA
Director of Government Affairs

Kent Sulem
MMUA
Director of Government Relations and Sr.
Counsel



March 6, 2023

Minnesota House Energy and Climate Finance and Policy Committee

Dear Chair and Committee members,

The Minnesota Community Action Partnership (MinnCAP) represents the 24 Community Action Agencies (CAA's) providing services to low- and moderate-income Minnesotans in all 87 counties. Nearly all CAA's administer the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) at the local level. Staff at these agencies meet with clients to determine eligibility, interact with energy vendors in their area to assure proper crediting of assistance payments and avoid service disconnections, and conduct outreach to all potentially eligible households. MinnCAP and its member agencies support HF 2493.

During the pandemic, Minnesota and all other states received supplemental LIHEAP funding appropriated by Congress to address the increased need for energy bill assistance stemming from job loss and illness. This funding allowed thousands of additional Minnesotans to remain safely housed and properly isolated to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Additional funding allowed MinnCAP-member agencies to respond to crisis situations, pay bill arrearages that had accumulated during the pandemic, and provide supplemental assistance to eligible households.

Unfortunately, while supplemental federal assistance has waned with COVID, the need we are seeing amongst the elderly, those with disabilities, and families with children living at home has not experienced a similar decline. Higher than normal heating costs, particularly for those heating with fuel oil, have driven some of this need. However, many of those that experienced loss of income during the pandemic have not recovered and live with daily choices about whether to pay for food, rent, medications, or utilities. We also know that the program does not always reach recent immigrants, or communities of color. HF 2493 begins to address these unmet needs with supplemental funding for households in crisis and additional funding for outreach to underserved communities.

MinnCAP thanks Rep. Kraft for bringing this bill forward, and this committee for its support.

Sincerely,

William Grant, Executive Director



Legal Services Advocacy Project
970 Raymond Avenue, Suite G-40
St. Paul, MN 55114

March 7, 2023

The Honorable Patty Acomb
Chair, Climate & Energy Finance & Policy Comm.
Minnesota House of Representatives
593 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Chris Swedzinski
Republican Lead, Climate & Energy Finance & Policy Comm.
Minnesota House of Representatives
295 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: HF 2493 – Supplemental Energy Assistance Fund

Dear Chair Acomb, Lead Swedzinski, and Members of the Committee:

Legal Aid writes to express its support for HF 2493, which would establish a supplemental energy assistance account, the money in which would be appropriated to the Department of Commerce to increase energy assistance supports for crisis grants and primary heat grants to supplement the state’s LIHEAP program. Legal Aid provides civil legal services to enable low-income Minnesotans, Minnesotans with disabilities, and elder Minnesotans to address legal problems impeding their ability to meet their basic needs. The Legal Services Advocacy Project, a statewide project of Legal Aid, provides legislative and administrative advocacy on behalf of our clients and all low-income Minnesotans.

According to the Minnesota Department of Commerce: “In Minnesota, the average energy burden is 2%, while low-income households average an energy burden of 8% and some Minnesotans face an energy burden exceeding 30%.”¹ “Energy burden” is the percentage of income a household devotes to energy.

The federal energy assistance program – the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) – is vital but insufficient to meet the need. According to the Citizens Utility Board, “there are almost 500,000 households in Minnesota eligible” for LIHEAP, but “[j]ust 25% of those eligible receive” LIHEAP assistance.² HF 2493 would supplement the federal LIHEAP program to ensure that more low-income Minnesotans are served to reduce their energy burden, help them pay their energy bills, reduce arrears, and increase energy security for these struggling households.

Thank you for allowing Legal Aid the opportunity comment on and express its support for HF 2493.

Sincerely,

Ron Elwood
Supervising Attorney

¹ Minnesota Department of Commerce, *Minnesota Energy Data Dashbord*; at Energy Data Dashboard (mn.gov).

² Citizens Utility Board, *Energy poverty: What is it and how do we understand it?*; at <https://cubminnesota.org/energy-poverty-what-is-it-and-how-do-we-understand-it/>.

March 7, 2023

Dear Madame Chair Acomb and members of the Climate and Energy Finance and Policy Committee:

The Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs (MCLA) is tasked to advise and inform on legislation and policy that pertains to Latino Minnesotans statewide and serve as a liaison between government and Latino communities.

I write in support of H.F. 2493 (Rep. Kraft), the *Supplemental Energy Assistance* legislative proposal. This bill will provide support from the state surplus to help more residents with the current high costs of energy. During our most recent listening sessions and conversations with young Latinos and their families, one of the most recurrent challenges we heard was how difficult it has been to recover financially after the pandemic, along with the rising cost of living.

This proposal appropriates funding to supplement the existing Energy Assistance program, which provides grants to income-qualified households to help with energy bills. Importantly, more families will be served through this proposal, particularly those from communities that are currently underserved and that only receive a fraction of this kind of assistance. For instance, this bill keeps the Energy Assistance program open during the summer, which will help households with air conditioning costs and will provide resources to qualifying families that face disconnection notices during the summer.

Energy Assistance is immediate funding to help pay the bills, but H.F. 2493 will also support long-term affordability. The application for Energy Assistance and Weatherization are the same, so people applying for Supplemental Energy Assistance can also get support to insulate their homes and replace their furnace, among others. Receiving Energy Assistance also qualifies people for affordability programs offered by many utilities, which caps monthly bills at a percentage of household income and can forgive a portion of past-due amounts.

Thank you very much for your consideration and support of this bill.

Sincerely,



Rosa Tock, Executive Director

100%

100% Campaign
705 Raymond Ave. - Suite 100
Saint Paul, MN 55114
www.100percentmn.org

March 7, 2023

Chair Acomb and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to express our support for Representative Athena Hollins' House File 2439 and Representative Larry Kraft's House File 2493.

As we transition to a cleaner and more equitable economy in Minnesota, it's essential that we include everyone, that everyone has a chance to participate, and that everyone benefits. If enacted, House Files 2439 and 2493 would help make this a reality for Minnesota families.

We support House File 2439, a bill to support smaller organizations that are participating in Public Utilities Commission (PUC) proceedings. Minnesota's PUC plays a vital role in implementing Minnesota's energy laws. However, participation in the proceedings presents a very high barrier to participation. Sustaining relevant legal and technical expertise for months, often years, is costly. This means the PUC is sometimes missing out on critical stakeholder perspectives. This bill will help address this challenge by providing a way for smaller organizations to be compensated for a portion of their costs. This bill will help lower the barrier to participation in one of Minnesota's most important regulatory bodies.

We support House File 2493, a bill that creates a Supplemental Energy Assistance Fund. Minnesota's Energy Assistance Program is a trusted and reliable program. It protects Minnesota families from excessive energy and repair costs during the months when we most need warmer homes. Expanding eligibility and outreach, and supplementing (but not replacing) federal investments is a smart way to serve more Minnesota families.

Please vote 'yes' on House File 2439 and House File 2493.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Aurora Vautrin

Aurora Vautrin
Legislative Director
100% Campaign
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March 8, 2023

Minnesota House of Representatives Climate and Energy Finance and Policy Committee
593 Minnesota State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Acomb and Committee Members,

Fresh Energy is a 30-year-old, Minnesota-based nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization. We work to shape and drive bold policy solutions to achieve equitable carbon-neutral economies. Fresh Energy is pleased to support Representative Kraft's House File 2493 to supplement funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and make the program year-round.

Many households across the states are struggling to pay their energy bills, especially at a time when energy costs continue to rise. Energy burden—the percentage of monthly income that a household spends on energy costs—is four-times higher for under-resourced households than for the average Minnesota household. LIHEAP serves under-resourced households who are struggling to pay their bills, particularly in times of emergency and crisis.

All Minnesotans should have access to reasonable energy costs throughout the year, not just during the winter. Expanding LIHEAP with this significant supplemental state funding aligns with Minnesota's commitment to equity and resiliency, in that it eases the energy burden in under-resourced households, allowing people to meet their immediate energy needs. This makes people more resilient to unexpected costs and builds economic stability. Meeting people where they are at is necessary if we want to ensure an equitable transition to a clean energy economy.

We thank Representative Kraft for his leadership and encourage members of the committee to support HF2493.

Sincerely,

Mari Ojeda
Senior Policy Associate, Energy Access and Equity
Fresh Energy
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414 Nicollet Mall
Minneapolis, MN 55401

March 7, 2023

State Office Building
Climate and Energy Finance and Policy Committee
Room 200
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: House File 2493, Supplemental Energy Assistance Fund

Chair Acomb, Representative Kraft, and members of the committee,

Xcel Energy supports the passage of the Supplemental Energy Assistance Fund legislation. The additional funding proposed not only allows more customers to receive energy assistance (LIHEAP) and therefore allow us to enroll more customers in our utility affordability programs, it also makes the program available year-round. We believe these proposals will help those customers who need it the most.

Sincerely,

Bria Shea
Regional Vice President, Regulatory Policy