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June 2, 2020

Jobs and Economic Development Finance Division  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: Youth Unemployment Insurance

Dear Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

We would like to thank the Committee for giving the issue of youth unemployment insurance a hearing.

**We urge the Committee to pass youth unemployment insurance legislation as part of the upcoming special session.** This legislation will be highly beneficial to Minnesota's youth and families in these unprecedented times. **We recommend expanding eligibility to all students, not just those who are 18+**, because many of the young people who have lost their jobs, regardless of age, are students working their way through school, or supporting their families, and should be eligible for these federal COVID-19 related benefits.

Minnesota is the only state we are aware of that denies enrolled high school students, who would otherwise be eligible, access state Unemployment Insurance and federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. This limits Minnesota's access to this federal benefit for the state's recovery. When youth are denied unemployment insurance benefits, they opt to drop out of school in order to access federal benefits to help sustain their families. When young people are forced to drop out for economic reasons, it jeopardizes the future of their education and their ability to participate in the economy.

Our mission at Youthprise is to increase equity with and for Minnesota's indigenous, low-income, and racially diverse youth—a mission which has taken on even greater urgency because of the disparate impact of COVID-19 in our society. At Youthprise, we are deeply invested in economic development for youth. We have programs like Opportunity Reboot which creates opportunities for economic prosperity by supporting programs and initiatives that build workforce skills, promote youth entrepreneurship, and expose youth to career pathways. We do this by supporting career readiness training at organizations that young people feel connected to, many of which offer culturally-specific programming. The East African Youth at Work initiative, supported by a state grant approved by your committee during the

2019 Session, is one example of these efforts. The initiative connects young people with a network of supporting organizations and schools, mentors in the workforce, as well as community organizations and resources. This work connects Youthprise to many high school students across the state who also work to support their families as primary breadwinners. **When students like this lose their jobs, it doesn't just mean the loss of some extra spending money but a loss of the essential income the family uses to cover their basic needs.**

Thank you for considering this important issue. Youthprise and the youth of Minnesota are hoping that adding our voices will highlight the significance of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wokie Weah', written in a cursive style.

Wokie Weah  
President