



April 15, 2021

Chair Rena Moran  
House Ways & Means Committee  
449 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Judiciary Finance & Civil Law Omnibus, HF1030

Dear Chair Moran,

By calling on each finance committee to embed racial equity into its work, you put forth a bold vision for the Minnesota House of Representatives. As the state's civil rights enforcement agency, the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR) could not agree more with this vision. We firmly believe the House's commitment to equity aligns and is strengthened by the work of our Department. Dedicated public servants work every day at MDHR to protect the civil rights of Minnesotans. As such, this letter details MDHR's appreciation for many elements within the House Judiciary Finance & Civil Law Omnibus bill (HF1030). It also highlights some areas where we look forward to continuing to work together so that all Minnesotans can lead lives of dignity, free from discrimination.

#### **Operating Adjustment**

With respect to HF1030, we are grateful that Chair Becker-Finn included our full operating adjustment in both FY22-23 and FY24-25. MDHR is a people-powered agency, with 80% of the Department's budget going to staff. This means the operating adjustment in HF1030 allows us to maintain current staffing levels so we can continue to provide civil rights protections to Minnesotans in every corner of the state.

#### **Workforce and Equal Pay Certificate Fee Adjustment**

We also greatly appreciate the inclusion of the Department's request to adjust our Workforce and Equal Pay Certificate fees from \$150 to \$250 for a four-year certificate. The certificates ensure that large contractors who work on state-funded projects follow existing equal pay laws and create fair hiring opportunities for Black, Indigenous, Minnesotans of color, and women. The Department's certificate fees have not been adjusted since their respective inceptions in 2003 (Workforce) and 2014 (Equal Pay). As such, we welcome HF1030's alignment with our Department's fee adjustment recommendation.

#### **Public Policies to Help Prevent Discrimination**

We are grateful of the shared policy alignment between MDHR, Chair Becker-Finn, and HF1030. The inclusion of the Preventing Pay Discrimination Act (Article 4, Sec. 6), our Compliance in State Contracting proposal (Article 4, Sec. 16 & 20), and the MDHR Policy/Technical proposal (Article 4, Sec. 1, 3, 10-14, 17, 18, 21) are welcomed components of HF1030. We also applaud the inclusion of the Interactive Process for Disability proposal (Article 4, Sec. 5) and the proposal to help prevent organ transplant discrimination (Article 4, Sec. 2 & 22). Combined, these proposals within Article 4 help build a more equitable and inclusive state, free from discrimination.

### **Improved Caseload Processing, Source of Income Discrimination, and Addressing Hate Crimes/Bias**

We are grateful that HF1030 increases the Department's budget by \$695,000 to help us better meet the civil rights needs of Minnesotans through some increased caseload processing and by strengthening source of income protections in housing. Additionally, with the inclusion of the hate crimes proposal (Article 4, Sec. 4), HF1030 meets the needs of the moment so as a state we can better track and respond to hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents, especially given the rise in anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander related hate. The increased investment in HF1030 is an important and welcomed step to provide MDHR with needed resources.

### **Further Conversations to Increase Investigative Capacity**

This said, we look forward to continuing to work together so the House can match the Governor and Lt. Governor's full budget request for our Department. The \$991,000 that MDHR requested is critical so that the Department can more effectively and efficiently investigate cases of discrimination. Investigating cases of discrimination is a core department function – and a statutory responsibility – that has suffered from chronic under-funding. The time is now to provide MDHR with needed resources that go directly to protecting the civil rights of Minnesotans.

### **What MDHR's Budget Means for Minnesotans**

The Minnesota Department of Human Rights is dedicated to ensuring that every Minnesotan can lead lives of dignity and joy, free from discrimination. When I think about what our budget means for Minnesotans, I think of Jameisha, a Black woman, who worked at an assisted living facility as a personal care assistant. Jameisha was repeatedly racially harassed at work, but her employer did nothing and she was eventually fired. Jameisha turned to MDHR to report the racial discrimination. Our investigation showed that she was fired because of her race, and we helped her recoup lost wages and damages. Importantly, we also required the senior living facility to implement policy changes to address and prevent future racial discrimination.

This case, and many others, demonstrate how every dollar invested in MDHR goes directly to making our state more equitable, ending disparities and inequities, and eliminating discrimination. I look forward to working with the Ways & Means Committee and the Judiciary and Public Safety Conference Committee to ensure that all Minnesotans can lead lives of dignity, free from discrimination.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Lucero  
Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Human Rights

cc. Chair Jamie Becker-Finn