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Legal Services Advocacy Project

970 Raymond Avenue, Suite G-40

St. Paul, MN 55114

February 25, 2022

The Honorable Ron Latz, Ranking Minority Member

Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy

Minnesota Senate

2215 Minnesota Senate Building

St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: S.F. 3029 – Eliminating Copy Fees for Uncertified Court Documents

Dear Sen. Latz:

Legal Aid writes in support of SF 3029. We assume the simple ban on charging a fee for an uncertified copy means for both copies obtained in person or online. SF 3029 makes sense and would be of great benefit to Legal Aid attorneys and their clients.

Access to court records is critical for our attorneys in representing our clients and to the matter at issue in their cases. It is especially helpful for our attorneys and clients in rural parts of the state where the ability to access and download copies of documents online saves significant time and money.

In addition, our low-income clients are harmed by the existence of records, such as eviction filings, to which they have a barrier to access. Removing fees would better enable, for example, tenants who have been denied housing based mistaken identity (which we have seen more than once) to demonstrate that the eviction filing on which the denial was based was not filed against them but rather against someone with the same or similar name.

Further, removing barriers to access to court records for low-income families can help them take the steps they need to fix their records. Some families are denied housing due to records that are many years old. They need access to the records to begin an expungement action. Access to records for families themselves can help bridge a gap in access to justice.  While a small fee may seem to be of little consequence to some, to our clients who struggle financially it can be a high barrier.

Thank you for carrying this bill and we urge its passage.

Sincerely,

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Ron Elwood

Supervising Attorney