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February 25, 2020

Chair Mariani

Dear Chair Mariani and members of the Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Committee,

First and foremost, thank you Chair Mariani and Members for all of the work you have been doing to make much needed improvements within our juvenile justice system. As you may know, The Link is a youth and adult led nonprofit based in north Minneapolis. The Link works with youth and young families to overcome the impacts of poverty and social injustice. In our programs, we serve youth who are experiencing homelessness, sexual exploitation and/or are involved in the juvenile justice system. Our programs are co-created and overseen by youth who have lived experience of the program's purpose to ensure we offer programs that are relevant and effective.

We, at The Link, have long known and see first hand with the youth we work with that our juvenile justice system's response to youth has lagged advancing brain science and adolescent development research. We also see the disproportionate rate of BIPOC youth within our juvenile justice system and the impact that this has on these young people, their families and our community. Our youth are in dire need of support, of healing, and adults in the community to surround and embrace them. This especially includes youth who may have done harm in our communities which is often times due to the lack of support they are receiving from our community and systems in the first place.

It is for this reason The Link supports this collection of Juvenile Justice legislation that moves us closer to regarding youth with their inherent dignity and worth and removes outdated and harmful practices. Many of the provisions in HF922 (Long) and HF947 (Pinto) have been identified by our RILE (Rooted In Lived Experience) Youth Advisory Committee as priorities that they would like to see changed in our juvenile justice system including ending of Solitary Confinement/DRT and use of restraints. We support these bills, along with the need for statewide data collection on the outdated EJJ (Extended Juvenile Jurisdiction) Program indicated in HF416 (Edelson). Lastly, we fully support the restoration of voting rights outlined in HF876 (Frazier), as we know that the generational cycle of disenfranchisement impacts entire communities and youth on our RILE committee have worked to Restore the Vote for years, despite many not even being of voting age yet. Their efforts reflect The Link's perspective that voice matters, especially in the vote.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these important bills in support of youth in our community.

Sincerely,

MaBeth Holger, CEO