



April 24, 2020

Rep. John Lesch, Chair
House Judiciary and Civil Law Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
563 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Rep. Peggy Scott, Republican Lead
House Judiciary and Civil Law Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
335 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Lesch and Representative Scott:

The coalition of undersigned organizations strongly support House File 4571, a bill that reforms civil asset forfeiture in Minnesota. This language reflects extensive negotiation between defense attorneys, justice reform advocates, prosecutors and law enforcement stakeholders in Minnesota.

Stakeholders on both sides started meeting last year and have devoted a significant amount of time and effort to reach this agreement. This was a lengthy and arduous process. But we believe the agreed-to language will focus law enforcement's use of civil asset forfeiture on individuals who pose a legitimate threat to public safety and will better safeguard civil liberties of Minnesotans.

As you know, civil asset forfeiture allows the government to seize money, vehicles, and other property suspected of being connected to criminal activity. Even if an individual is never charged with a crime, their property can be seized and ultimately forfeited. Under current law, people wishing to reclaim seized property must engage in expensive litigation to get their property back, and often times costs much more than the value of the seized currency or property itself. This is a separate, civil process that is completely unrelated to any criminal process. The established system burdens property owners and creates administrative burdens for law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement agencies must go through various steps in the forfeiture process, including the storage and sale of vehicles, at a cost to taxpayers.

The agreed upon forfeiture language implements reforms by changing the following:

- Reforms the DWI forfeiture statute to expand the use of ignition interlock, requires entrance into treatment courts, and focuses seizure and forfeitures on repeat offenders;
- Provides additional protections for innocent owners and aligns with a recent Minnesota Supreme Court case that requires a prompt hearing;
- Prevents law enforcement from circumventing state forfeiture laws by accessing and utilizing the federal sharing program;
- Establishes a \$1,500 threshold for money and property that can be subject to forfeiture unless there is probable cause that the property or currency was directly used in the commission of certain crimes;
- Creates transparent reporting requirements for forfeited property and the use of forfeiture revenue by local municipalities;
- Waives storage fees and some filing fees for individuals and innocent owners; and
- Requires a recidivism study to track efficacy of forfeiture and ignition interlock as strategies to reduce the number of repeat DWI offenders.

We hope we can count on your support for this important legislation. House File 4571 will enable law enforcement to keep our communities safe while protecting the rights of Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

William Ward, State Public Defender
Minnesota Board of Public Defense

Holly Harris, Executive Director
Justice Action Network

John Gordon, Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota

Drew Schaffer, Executive Director
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid

Andy Birrell, President
Minnesota Association of Criminal Defense Attorneys

Jason Flohrs, State Director
Americans for Prosperity – Minnesota

CC: Members of the House Judiciary and Civil Law Committee