

February 25, 2021

Chair Alice Hausman
453 State Office Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: H.F. 835

Dear Chair Hausman and Housing Finance & Policy Committee members,

Increasing choice and access is critical to addressing Minnesota's affordable housing crisis. Unfortunately, numerous barriers to safe, decent and affordable housing exist statewide. Lawmakers must do everything to ensure that households with access to any form of housing assistance do not face source of income (SOI) discrimination. Sections 1, 2, and 3 of H.F. 835, which amend Minnesota's Human Rights Act by clarifying that housing assistance programs are covered by source of income protections, provide one path to reducing barriers and increasing access.

Housing assistance is a valuable tool for helping families remain stably housed and find secure, affordable housing. Unfortunately, current law protecting rental assistance holders from source of income discrimination is weakened by court interpretation. A minor tweak to the Human Rights Act, clarifying that housing discrimination based on a person's source of income is illegal, is required to ensure that those with housing assistance can best utilize it.

According to research conducted by the American Bar Association, families with federal Housing Choice Vouchers have greater success using their vouchers in jurisdictions with strong SOI laws. A study by the Department of Housing and Urban Development found dramatically lower rates of discrimination against families using Housing Choice Vouchers in areas with strong SOI protections. And, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has found that in states without SOI laws, renters face less choice in the range of cities or neighborhoods where they can find housing.

Amending Minnesota's Human Rights Act as proposed in H.F. 835 will improve Minnesotans' access to safe and stable homes. Too often, people eligible for assistance wait years to get on a waiting list for housing assistance, and then wait years more to receive the housing assistance. When these households are discriminated against by landlords that refuse to accept rental assistance as payment, they are denied the promise and opportunity to find safe, stable and affordable homes.

Sincerely,

Anne Mavity, Executive Director, Minnesota Housing Partnership
Alan Arthur, President & CEO, AEON
Barb Jeanetta, Executive Director, Alliance Housing
Paula Prah, Vice President of Public Affairs, Dominionium
Ellen Sahli, President, Family Housing Fund
Warren Hanson, President & CEO, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund
Eric Hauge, Executive Director, HOME Line
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cc: House Housing Finance & Policy Committee Members