

April 7, 2021

Representative Mariani and members of the Committee—

My name is Jay Claire. I am a constituent of District 64A, speaking on behalf of the Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee. I am testifying in regard to HF 2349, or, Article 4 of this omnibus: the establishment of the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act.

Broadly speaking, we—and many of our incarcerated friends and loved ones—consider this policy a welcome and necessary step toward a safer and more equitable Minnesota. It is encouraging to see the Department of Corrections bring policy aimed at shrinking a violent and unwieldy carceral system; and, at the same time, we harbor deep concerns about the relatively narrow demographic eligible for earned incentive release credit as drafted.

Our recommendations are two-fold. One: we advocate for universal credit eligibility, and the elimination of Section 5 (244.034). Two: We recommend that Section 13 explicitly stipulate retroactive application of earned incentive release credit to time already served by the currently incarcerated, provided they have completed programming commensurate with the requirements of the policy. Reducing time served in favor of a rehabilitative model is an approach with strong evidentiary support; de-incentivizing the participation of those perceived as the greatest public safety threat runs the risk of rendering this legislation cosmetic at best, counterproductive at worst.

Understandably, many incarcerated people are deeply invested in the outcome of this legislation. Several of the people we have spoken to this week have asked about the possibility of providing testimony, and submitted written or recorded material for the consideration of this Committee. I feel compelled to acknowledge that it is neither easy nor convenient to research, compose, and record a testimony before a House committee from prison; doing so is a gesture of intense commitment to civic participation and meaningful engagement with the legislative process. If you hear these testimonies today, I encourage you to afford them their due gravity and attention.

Thank you.