



March 21, 2023

Chair Kelly Moller  
Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives  
*Via Electronic Delivery*

**Re: Letter in Support of H.F. 2956 –**

Members of the House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee:

Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN), the coalition to end relationship abuse, writes in support of H.F. 2956 – a bill that creates an avenue for victim/survivors and their voices to be heard by offering to expand the membership of the Sentencing Guidelines Commission. We are a statewide coalition that consists of over 80 member programs working to end relationship abuse. Our member programs provide direct services and support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence in all 87 counties in Minnesota.

We know that domestic violence is a debilitating cycle of abuse that impacts victims/survivors, their families, and communities. Through this cycle, victim/survivors often retreat back to an abuser and the violent relationship they find themselves running from. Our criminal legal system has attempted to reduce intimate-partner violence through the enhancement of punitive punishments – a practice that has had limited success in reducing domestic and sexual assaults, and that has created unanticipated negative impacts for some survivors.

Violence Free Minnesota believes that victim and community safety is enhanced with good criminal legal system reform. Through our work, victim/survivors have told us they want the person who harmed them to have access to resources and education that can transform their abusive behavior – not lengthy prison sentences. H.F. 2956 looks to address the safety needs of victims by creating a space for treatment providers within the sentencing commission to facilitate treatment and rehabilitative resources within the sentencing process.

Based on national statistics, we know that nearly 97% of some female prison populations report prior histories of victimization. In order to advocate effectively for victim safety, victims/survivors need more pathways to having their voices and concerns heard. H.F. 2956 creates more opportunities for victim/survivors and their domestic and sexual assault advocates to also sit on the commission – a tool that could further deepen our understanding of the unique and systemic experiences of victim/survivors and people who use abuse.

H.F. 2956 makes a good faith effort to understand and address the needs of victim/survivors, people who have caused harm, and their communities, by allowing them an opportunity to have input within the Sentencing Guidelines Commission. We urge you to vote yes on H.F. 2956.

Sincerely,

Guadalupe Lopez  
Executive Director  
Violence Free Minnesota

Shenika Chambers  
Policy Program Manager  
Violence Free Minnesota