



May 11, 2022

The Honorable Carlos Mariani
449 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Warren Limmer
3221 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Mariani, Chair Limmer, and Conference Committee Members:

Now that the Public Safety and Judiciary Conference Committee has convened, I am writing to express the importance of including civil rights priorities as the committee negotiates its omnibus bill.

As the state's civil rights enforcement agency, the Minnesota Department of Human Rights' (MDHR) mission is to help ensure that Minnesotans can lead lives of dignity, free from discrimination. A critical component of achieving this mission is advancing budgetary and policy proposals that will help reduce inequities and disparities across our state. This letter highlights both budget and policy priorities, all of which are also reflected in the Governor and Lt. Governor's respective budget and policy agendas.

Supplemental Budget

- **Increasing the Department's Investigative Capacity**
Minnesotans deserve a strong civil rights agency to turn to if they experience discrimination. This \$492,000 investment in fiscal year 2023, and \$922,000 in fiscal years 2024-25, allows MDHR to hire additional investigators to decrease caseloads so investigations can be done as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- **Improving the State's Ability to Track Bias and Hate Incidents**
Minnesota needs better data collection in order to take actionable steps to address acts of bias and hate. This \$388,000 investment in fiscal year 2023, and \$486,000 in fiscal years 2024-25, allows MDHR to track, analyze, and report on bias and hate incidents, as well as collaborate with community-based groups who are conducting their own data collection.
- **Funding the Bias Response & Community Equity Outreach Team**
Nonprofits, local governments, law enforcement, schools, and businesses all have a role to play in creating safe and welcome spaces for Minnesotans. This \$1,185,000 investment in fiscal year 2023 and \$2,002,000 in fiscal year 2024-25 would build a team fully equipped to create long-term partnerships across communities to help curb hate and discrimination. This team would also immediately respond to hate incidents by providing culturally competent support to local

communities, helping ensure that Minnesotans who experience hate are heard and supported.

- **Strengthening the Department’s Enforcement Capabilities in State Contracting**

Minnesota thrives when state investments are used to intentionally undo disparities and inequities. This is why MDHR works with more than 3,000 state contractors to ensure men and women are compensated equally for equal work and that contractors are making good faith efforts towards their workforce goals. MDHR has put forth two requests in this area. The first is an investment of \$228,000 in fiscal year 2023 and \$456,000 in fiscal years 2024-25 that will provide MDHR with needed resources to help support state contractors’ equity and inclusion efforts. The second is a one-time investment of \$250,000 in fiscal year 2023 to provide funding for MDHR to consult with experts that will allow for better utilization of data and technology when evaluating state contractors’ compliance.

Policy

- **The CROWN Act**

The strong bipartisan vote (104 – 26) by the Minnesota House on February 28, 2022, underscores the importance of and broad support for the CROWN Act. The CROWN Act provides an important plain language update to the Minnesota Human Rights Act to ensure the definition of race includes natural hair inherit to racial identity. When this bill received a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee, Minnesotans from across the state testified to their experiences – and the prevalence – of discrimination they experienced because of their natural hair. Their testimony was clear: hair discrimination is race discrimination and the CROWN Act is a critical piece of legislation to help reduce racial discrimination in Minnesota.

- **The Take Pride Act**

Time and time again, Minnesota has chosen to be an inclusive and welcoming state. In 1993, Minnesota became the first state in the country to prohibit someone from being fired or evicted because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. However, a lot has changed since then and now is the time to update sections of the law. This proposal removes three narrow sections in the Minnesota Human Rights Act so Minnesota’s civil rights law reflects the values of our state.

- **The Preventing Pay Discrimination Act**

Women continue to be paid less than men for the same job. The pay gap is even larger for women of color and Indigenous women. To help close this gap, it is important to protect workers from being required to disclose their previous pay history when negotiating their pay. Eighteen states already have this protection and pay for all women increased by 6% and pay for Black workers increased by 13%.¹ in the states that already implemented the policy.

¹ Bessen, Meng, and Denk, (2020). Perpetuating Inequality: What Salary History Bans Reveal About Wages. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3628729>

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this letter detailing the importance of incorporating civil rights into the public safety and judiciary omnibus bill. I also greatly appreciate the inclusion of our full budget and policy priorities by the Minnesota House.

I look forward to working with both House and Senate conferees to advance an omnibus bill that strengthens civil rights protections for Minnesotans. Please feel free to contact me or Eric Armacanqui (eric.armacanqui@state.mn.us), MDHR's Government Relations Director, with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Lucero', with a small asterisk below the 'o'.

Rebecca Lucero
Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Human Rights