



Representative Sarah Anderson  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd  
583 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator Warren Limmer  
95 University Avenue W.  
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 3221  
St. Paul, MN 55155

April 7, 2017

Dear Representative Anderson and Senator Limmer,

I am writing to provide some additional information about the Minnesota Department of Human Rights budget. The Department strongly supports Governor Dayton's proposed budget as it provides for critical investments to ensure that we create opportunities for all people in Minnesota. Both the House and Senate proposals fail to improve our level of service for the people of Minnesota, while the House's proposal to cut MDHR's budget by 24% takes a huge step backward.

During my time as Commissioner, the need and demand for the services provided by the Department by the people living in every corner of our great state no matter their age, gender, race, or whether they identify as a person with a disability has grown. As you know, disability discrimination complaints are the most common charge filed with MDHR and the Department has resolved disputes in 81 of the 87 counties in Minnesota during my tenure. Moreover, the Department is more actively involved in proactive efforts throughout Minnesota to address economic disparities. Unfortunately, we have 15 fewer people to provide these needed services than we did two decades ago.

#### **Governor Dayton's Budget Request**

I would ask you to adopt Governor Dayton proposed budget of \$5,610,000 in FY2018 and \$6,006,000 in FY2019 for MDHR; this included funding to open regional offices, maintain operations at current levels, and implement a Ban the Box for Housing proposal. Governor Dayton's budget recognizing the important role of the Department in ensuring that opportunities for all people occur in Minnesota is proposing making proactive investments in the Department's capacity to fund: (1) maintaining current operations, (2) establishing regional offices and add capacity to the Department's sole regional office in St. Cloud and (3) helping individuals secure rental housing.

**Regional Offices:** The Governor's budget includes new regional offices in Rochester, Duluth, and Worthington, and provides an additional individual in the Department's St. Cloud Office. This is a significant opportunity to build upon the positive education and outreach efforts being asked for by businesses, governments, and community groups throughout Minnesota to generate economic development and prosperity. The Department has partnered with local communities and has the support of the mayors of these four communities. The regional offices will also help ensure that more Minnesotans are within two hours or less of a Department office. Often for people who are poor and

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

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financially vulnerable, frail due to age or who are being subjected to some form or physical abuse, the ability to meet directly with someone from the Department is critically important.

**Maintain Operations:** Included in the base figures of the Governor's budget was \$248,000 in FY2018 and \$444,000 in FY2019 to maintain services at current levels. This is partially funded in the Senate proposal, but without full funding, the Department will not be able to provide the critical services Minnesotans need in a timely way. As you recall, during testimony, the Department without adequate funding will not be able to serve many of the low income and vulnerable people that need help. If the Department does not receive this level of funding, the length of time to complete investigations will dramatically rise and both charging parties and respondents will be harmed. Women who have wrongfully suffered sexual harassment and experienced economic harm should not have to wait for justice. Business owners who want to remove the cloud of doubt over their workplace should not have to wait. Additionally, the collaborative and proactive work of the Department to create inclusive workforces, support emerging entrepreneurs, and increase civic engagement will be jeopardized.

**Ban the Box for Housing:** The provision is needed to reduce recidivism to ensure that individuals reentering the community have the opportunity to successfully obtain rental housing. This funding builds upon the Legislature's efforts concerning Ban the Box in employment and criminal expungement.

### **House Position**

The House proposal, contained in SF605/HF691<sup>1</sup>, fails to address the current needs of Minnesotans and greatly reduces our ability serve vulnerable Minnesotans. The House proposes a major cut of 23.8% to the Department of Human Rights, without identifying any of the services that the Department of Human Rights should reduce or eliminate. This bill only funds 55% of Governor Dayton's proposed budget for the Department. This proposal would also undermine the Department's ability to maintain our existing regional office in St. Cloud.

The House position is extremely concerning to the Department because it completely eliminates funding for recent statutory obligations placed upon the Department, significantly undermines the many positive gains made by the Department to protect vulnerable Minnesota, and fails to provide for the growing needs of many vulnerable people in Minnesota. The Department is already significantly smaller than it was two decades ago. As discussed above, the length of time to complete investigations will dramatically rise and both charging parties and respondents will be harmed. None of the people served by the Department deserve long delays. Additionally, the positive proactive work of the Department to support economic development, civic engagement and collaboratively address workforce shortages, such as in construction, will be dramatically impacted.

Accordingly, we ask that the Committee consider amending the budget bill and adopting the proposed budget request of Governor Dayton. Vulnerable Minnesotans rely on the people of the Department to protect their rights by providing education, investigating complaints of discrimination, and working with state contractors to secure job opportunities. Losing people in the Department because of inadequate funding from the Legislature will result in vulnerable Minnesotans needlessly losing valuable protections

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Human Rights has mismatched finance committee jurisdictions, with MDHR's budget in the Judiciary/Public Safety budget in the Governor's and Senate budgets, and in the State Government Finance budget in the House. This was also the case in 2015, when MDHR's budget was conferenced in Judiciary/Public Safety.

under law. The Committee should invest in creating opportunities for all throughout Minnesota by adopting the proposed budget request of Governor Dayton.

### **Senate Position**

We appreciate the efforts made by Senator Limmer in SF803 to provide an additional \$35,000 in FY2018 and \$50,000 in FY2019 to address increasing healthcare costs within the Department and for his comments about the Senate discussing how to provide funding for added pension and salary costs that the Department of Human Rights and all other agencies face.

However, we would like to highlight some of the missed opportunities the bill and the apparent spirit in the Senate to fund pension and salary costs fails to address. Specifically, the Governor's budget, with new regional offices in Rochester, Duluth, and Worthington and an additional individual in the Department's St. Cloud Office, is a significant missed opportunity to build upon the positive economic development and education and outreach efforts of the Department. The mayors of Duluth, Rochester, St. Cloud, and Worthington support the opening of regional offices for the Department as the proactive efforts of the Department to create greater dialog and facilitate consensus among all people is sought by business and community groups in greater Minnesota.

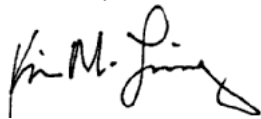
Additionally, the Senate bill fails to provide funding for the Governor's Housing Ban the box proposal. As discussed above, this initiative would build upon the past work that has been championed by the Senate Judiciary committee in the past concerning Ban the Box in employment and criminal expungement.

### **Conclusion**

As you proceed forward in budget negotiations, I would ask that you fund the Department at the level identified within the Governor's budget. I hope you will not hesitate to contact me or MDHR's Public Policy Director, Scott Beutel at (651) 231-2795 or by email at [scott.beutel@state.mn.us](mailto:scott.beutel@state.mn.us).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Lindsey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and a stylized "L".

Kevin Lindsey  
Commissioner

cc: Members of the Judiciary Public Safety Conference Committee  
Joane McAfee, Office of Governor Mark Dayton