

To: Mark Dayton, Governor

cc. Hon. Kurt Daudt, Speaker of the House

cc. Hon. Paul Gazelka, Majority Leader



Governor Dayton, Speaker Daudt, and Leader Gazelka,

In 1967, just a few years after the landmark Civil Rights Act (1964) and Voting Rights Act (1965) were passed in Congress, the Minnesota legislature established the Department of Human Rights. This department was created to ensure the full compliance with, and enforcement of, federal civil rights law, and to do the same for Minnesota's own civil rights legislation - the Minnesota Human Rights Act.

The department's primary purpose is to investigate and resolve charges of discrimination, and to use education and outreach to eliminate discrimination and disparate outcomes - in education; in housing; in voting rights; and in all other areas of state policy. The department responds to allegations made by individuals and organizations regarding human rights violations, and ensures private businesses seeking contracts with the state government follow equal opportunity and affirmative action regulations.

We do not believe this department, or its mission, is a luxury. Rather, it is a vital and necessary regulatory and protective body - one that our state, and the many Minnesotans who face discrimination and bigotry on a regular basis, cannot do without. Yet, every appropriations cycle, the Department of Human Rights is targeted for severe funding cuts. Over the past several years, the department received less and less funding, leading to significant reductions in staff, and, by extension, a reduction in the department's ability to fulfil its mission, as required by M.S. 363A. It also has impacted the department's ability to monitor compliance by contractors and carryout many of its proactive duties outlined in M.S. 363A.06.

Due to these funding cuts, the department cannot function effectively. Since the 1990s, the department has been forced to cut its staff by more than half. This alone is unacceptable to us. And still, the most recent appropriations proposal includes even more budget cuts.

The appropriations bill passed by the House includes a reduction of \$1.4 million for the Department of Human Rights. This represents more than 30% of the department's already meager funding, and would necessitate the layoff of at least 18 employees - 40% of the department's staff.

We find it unconscionable that a budget proposal, at a time when the state carries a surplus of more than \$300 million, would target an already gutted department with such an important mission. As an example of the critical work the department does, and the importance of its

continued effectiveness, we point to a recent study commissioned by the department, which showed Minnesota students of color comprise 31 percent of the population, yet receive 66 percent of all suspensions and expulsions, and that students with disabilities comprise 14 percent of the population, yet receive 43 percent of all suspensions and expulsions.

Minnesota has more residents of color, low-income residents, recent immigrants, open LGBTQ residents, and members of other protected classes, than ever before. Jewish Community Centers have been threatened and a Bloomington mosque bombed. Now is the time to strengthen the Department of Human Rights - not destroy it. There will be more charges to be investigated; more businesses to be regulated; more violations in need of redress. We cannot cut this department's budget. Certainly not now.

As individuals who represent communities who frequently, and recently, are targets of human rights violations, we urge the legislature to amend the current appropriations proposal to strike the budget cuts to the Department of Human Rights. Indeed, we believe the department should receive significantly more funding than it currently receives.

This is not merely the government's responsibility, as enumerated in state statute 363A. We believe it is our moral obligation as well.

Thank you.

Signed,

**Jewish Community Action
Council on American-Islamic Relations - Minnesota
National Council of Jewish Women Minnesota
Outfront Minnesota
Isaiah
Land Stewardship Project
Inquilinxs Unidxs Por Justicia
Communications Workers of America MN State Council
Navigate MN/Unidos MN
TakeAction Minnesota
MN350
Minnesota Nurses Association
Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL)
COPAL
SEIU Minnesota Healthcare
Main Street Alliance Minnesota**