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September 1st, 2021

The Honorable Sen. Karin Housley and Rep. Ryan Winkler
Frontline Worker Pay Working Group
Minnesota State Capitol Building
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, #130
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: Include employees at AIDS Service Organizations in Essential Worker Hazard Pay

Dear Frontline Worker Pay Working Group,

We write to urge Minnesota to include employees from HIV services and outreach to receive hazard pay as frontline workers during COVID-19. Employees in the HIV sector in Minnesota have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic with populations disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the systemic nature of healthcare inequities, the populations that are disproportionately affected by COVID are also disproportionately impacted by HIV. The employees at the below signatories have only increased their engagement with the HIV community to meet the growing demand for services created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities are disproportionately impacted by both HIV and COVID-19, with Black Americans 43% more likely to die of COVID-19 than white Americans (<https://covidtracking.com/race>). In Minnesota specifically, compared to white people, Hispanic or Latino people are 106% more likely to be infected with COVID-19, Black people are 54% more likely, and Indigenous people are 13% more likely (<https://covidtracking.com/data/#state-mn>). Clients of Twin Cities' AIDS Services Organizations (ASOs) are disproportionately

These trends are reflected in HIV infections, with BIPOC people comprising 17% of the state's population but 69% of new HIV diagnoses in 2020 (bit.ly/2020MDHHIV). Due to systemic discrimination and racism, people of color in Minnesota are nearly three times as likely to be living below the poverty line (bit.ly/2018MNC). According to a 2016 CDC report, "Individuals living below the poverty line were twice as likely to be HIV-infected as those who lived in the same community but lived above the poverty line" (bit.ly/2016cdc). Our employees have been diligently providing vital services like housing, food, healthcare, and prevention to the Minnesotans who have needed it most during the pandemic.

Not only are BIPOC folks more likely to die of COVID and be HIV positive, but Minnesota is also in the midst of a sustained HIV outbreak. According to MDH, the increase in HIV can be directly attributed to homeless encampments around the Twin Cities, with over 30 new infections linked to homeless encampments since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Hennepin County Public Health's HIV/AIDS Program, approximately 600 people living with HIV in the Twin Cities are either homeless or unstably housed. Every day our employees are providing outreach and prevention services to people experiencing homelessness around the Twin Cities. This puts our staff directly on the frontlines of the multiple crises of COVID, HIV, and homelessness.



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Given the overwhelming data, we strongly recommend that Minnesota add HIV services and outreach workers to the list of employees to receive COVID-19 hazard pay. These additional funds will help to demonstrate how critical they are to the pandemic recovery.

Sincerely,

Matt Toburen, Executive Director, **Aliveness Project**
Gwen Velez, Executive Director, **African American AIDS Task Force**
Phoebe Trepp, Executive Director, **Clare Housing**
Bill Tiedemann, Executive Director, **Hope House**
Sharon Day, Executive Director, **Indigenous Peoples Task Force**
Jeremy Hanson Willis, CEO, **Rainbow Health**
Mary McCarthy, Executive Director, **Rural AIDS Action Network**
Val Smith, Executive Director, **Youth and AIDS Project**