Thank you, Chairman Persell and members of the Committee. My name is Suraya Williams, and I am the Legal Fellow for Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, or MCEA. MCEA is a public interest non-profit law firm and advocacy organization that has defended Minnesota’s environment using the law and science since 1974. I am here today to express our support for H.F. 3057.

At MCEA, our mission is to protect Minnesota’s environment, its natural resources, and the health of its people. One way we accomplish this is by working directly with communities throughout the state to help address environmental issues. Our work often leads to a deeper understanding of the environmental impacts on the livelihood of Minnesotans, and we are striving to find solutions. MCEA believes H.F. 3057 can be part of the solution to protect the health of Minnesotans.

Protecting the environment is a collaborative effort, and there is a large disconnect between communities and permitted facilities in Minnesota. There is a lack of dialogue that has led to a significant amount of distrust and misinformation. People who live in close proximity to permitted facilities feel their air is being exploited and that their health is being taken for granted. We have to hold facilities with non-expiring state individual air quality permits accountable for their actions and ensure they are in compliance. Just because their permit does not expire, does not mean their activities shouldn’t be questioned or that a facility is free from being held to community standards.

Citizens want to understand the components of a permit, the operations of a facility, and elements of permit compliance because it has a direct impact on their lives. An example of this desire to get answers comes from people MCEA has worked with in North Minneapolis. The community members are at a loss when they find that a facility with a non-expiring permit is in compliance, but they can still smell toxic fumes coming from the facility and
asthma rates are not changing for the better. The community is not fully informed about these facilities, despite substantial efforts to reach out to these facilities and permitting agencies. Currently, there is nothing in place to allow citizens to stay informed and inquire about the functionality of a facility once it has its permit.

A public informational meeting can bridge the gap between citizens and the permitted facilities they live amongst. There is no reason for facilities with nonexpiring state individual air quality permits to avoid contact with their neighbors. People do not have the luxury of avoiding these facilities because these facilities’ presence can be felt in the air on a daily basis, so it’s only fair that the facilities be prevented from avoiding the community they are a part of. People need to breathe, and they cannot escape the environmental impacts of these facilities. Since these facilities have direct impacts on communities, the facilities need to answer directly to the communities.

Minnesotans need their voice heard when it comes to the environmental impacts of permitted facilities, and H.F. 3057 gives Minnesotans a way to do this more effectively. MCEA appreciates Rep. Lee and this Committee’s efforts to preserve Minnesota’s environment and natural resources, and we look forward to working with the House on its continued efforts.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.