

Appellate Victory Frees Millions in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance for Minnesota Students

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MINNEAPOLIS (Dec. 8, 2020) — Lathrop GPM Litigation & Dispute Resolution Partner Gregory R. Merz recently won a significant victory in the Minnesota Court of Appeals regarding a dispute over the eligibility of state high school students for benefits under the federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program.

On behalf of both an individual client whose application for PUA benefits had been denied and nonprofit client Youthprise, Merz successfully challenged the state's position that high school students in Minnesota are not eligible for federal unemployment benefits under the CARES Act.

The Minnesota Court of Appeals ruled on the matter on the same day the hearing was held, which is highly unusual. The court's decision will benefit thousands of high school students throughout the state who will now be eligible for the federal unemployment benefit. It will also benefit low-income families that depend on their teenagers' wages to help make ends meet, as many of those students were working in the types of jobs that evaporated during the pandemic.

According to Youthprise, Merz's willingness to take on this case pro bono, to zealously advocate for the students and their families, and to treat them all with tremendous respect went a long way toward restoring the teenagers' faith in the justice and political systems.

In Dec. 2 coverage of the case, the *Star Tribune* article, "Minnesota court finds jobless high school students can access pandemic unemployment benefits," noted that the court's decision made \$14 million to \$28 million in benefits available to the state's high school students. The daily newspaper also mentioned Youthprise's appreciation for Merz's work and the firm's representation.

"On behalf of the Youthprise staff, Board of Directors, and the young people of Minnesota, we extend our sincerest appreciation to Lathrop GPM LLP for your invaluable pro bono efforts in advancing our case to achieve equity in the distribution of unemployment benefits for Minnesota's high school students. We are especially grateful for Greg Merz's acumen, tenacity and professionalism, which were foundational to generating a favorable ruling by the Minnesota Court of Appeals." said Wokie Weah, President of Youthprise.



At Youthprise, the mission is "to increase equity with and for Minnesota's indigenous, low-income and racially diverse youth.

Learn more about the firm's pro bono work [here](#).