

May 2, 2024

Representative Mike Freiberg  
381 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator Jim Carlson  
95 University Avenue W.  
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3221  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Freiberg, Chair Carlson and members of the Conference Committee,

As student leaders representing colleges across the state, we are passionate advocates for civic participation. Voting serves as a fundamental pillar of democracy, offering young individuals a crucial opportunity to shape the trajectory of our nation. **We urge you to include language expanding polling locations on college campuses in the final conference committee report of the Elections Omnibus bill (HF4772/ SF4729).**

The recent surge in youth voter turnout in Minnesota is a testament to the growing commitment of young people to participate in the democratic process. In fact, Minnesota students have led the nation in student voter turnout over the past three elections. This success is a clear indication of the positive impact that expanding polling locations on college campuses can have. However, despite these successes, significant disparities in voter turnout persist among marginalized communities. The number one barrier is access, such as transportation challenges and inconvenient polling locations, which disproportionately affect young non-voters.

Addressing these barriers requires innovative solutions, such as opening on-campus polling places, which have proven effective in enhancing voter accessibility. The initiative undertaken by students at St. Paul College in 2018 serves as a compelling example of the impact of on-campus polling locations in facilitating voter engagement. By providing a convenient and familiar setting for voting, the event saw increased participation, particularly among first-time voters.

Furthermore, the initiative not only simplified the voting process but also served as an educational opportunity for attendees. Students were equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to make informed decisions at the ballot box through voter registration assistance, guidance on the voting procedure, and access to candidate information. And the costs were nominal.

For years, student leaders have advocated for expanding polling locations on college campuses. Last year, the Minnesota legislature changed the law allowing municipalities to open up pop-up early voting locations in the 2023 Elections Omnibus legislation. Since then, no city or county has expanded polling locations on a college campus. We must not allow student participation in democracy to be hampered by bureaucratic red tape.

We urge the conference committee to consider the importance of youth voter engagement in shaping our future. Please adopt the House language included in HF3447 and prioritize initiatives that expand voter access and address the barriers preventing young people from exercising their right to vote. Together, we can ensure that every voice is heard and that our democracy remains strong and inclusive for generations to come.

Thank you for your dedication to promoting civic participation.

Sincerely,

Deborah Wallen - President  
Inver Hills Community College Student Senate

Ezekiel Riemer, Student Senate President  
Alexandria Technical and Community College

Bri Adams, President  
Staples Student Senate

John Runningen, President  
M-State Fergus Falls  
M-State Wadena

Colin Ringgenberg, President  
M-State Moorhead