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April 16, 2020

RE: Support for HF3499

Dear Members of the House State Government Finance Commission:

AARP writes today to ask that you take immediate steps to ensure upcoming elections are conducted in a manner that protects the health and safety of voters while strengthening access to voting and protecting our fundamental right to vote.

AARP has been working to promote the health and well-being of older Americans for more than 60 years. On behalf of our nearly 650,000 Minnesota members and all older Minnesotans, we appreciate the Minnesota Legislature's leadership and response to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the ongoing efforts required as we move forward. As you consider the next steps to address the various facets of this public health emergency, we urge you to continue to be especially mindful of older adults, who are most at risk from this disease and who vote more than any other age group.

For nearly 40 years, the turnout of voters over age 50 has significantly outpaced that of younger Americans. In the 2016 presidential election, for example, 71 percent of Americans over 65 voted, compared with 46 percent among 18- to 29-year-olds, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. This is a trend that will continue.

As data is beginning to show, our upcoming state primary and general elections may indeed be impacted by the pandemic. We support the appropriation of Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds and additional COVID-19 related funds to ensure access to voting and protect the health and well-being of voters and the many retired volunteers who serve as poll workers during elections.

The appropriation of HAVA funds is necessary to protect the health and safety of Minnesota voters and poll workers. AARP also believes Minnesota should begin efforts to prepare for alternative means for voters to cast their ballot that do not require them to physically go to a polling station. Specifically, AARP Minnesota is recommending that Minnesota:

- Take whatever steps are necessary to enable the state to send an absentee ballot to all registered voters in the state who wish to vote by mail;
- Take steps to close or relocate polling stations in high risk locations such as long-term care facilities and senior centers; and
- Allow trained employees of health care facilities to administer the absentee voting process to temporary or permanent residents and patients.

AARP
Real Possibilities

While we do not know how long this health crisis will last, we do know that Minnesota can lead the nation in taking steps today to mitigate its impact on our fundamental right to vote. We look forward to working with you to ensure Minnesotans can all have a safe and accurate way to participate in the election process during this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Will Phillips', written in a cursive style.

Will Phillips
State Director
AARP Minnesota