

January 27, 2021

Chair Michael Nelson and Members of the State Government Finance and Elections Committee,

We are writing today to voice our support for House File 9.

Minnesotans believe in democracy. We believe in it, because we are it.

Our school boards and city halls are run by hairdressers and teachers, nurses, soldiers, mothers, and small business owners. Every part-time state legislator is also a full-time Minnesotan. Those elected at every level of government, from our Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor to our U.S. Senator, are people we might bump into at the grocery store.

The idea that any of us, if we get the majority of votes, could be in office matters. That those in office are people like us is what makes our democracy work. **We expect Minnesota's governments to be fully representative, responsive to popular demand, and capable of acting both in a crisis and for the long-term.** Meeting those expectations depends on Minnesotans' having the ability to freely exercise our votes.

We support House File 9 because it takes voting as seriously as we do. There are five key reasons for our support.

First, House File 9 makes it easier for all eligible Minnesotans to vote. Its pre-registration and automatic voter registration provisions make it easier to register. Its improvements to our permanent absentee voting system make it simpler for those who opt-in to stay active as absentee voters. Its revisions to our absentee voting system make that form of voting less complicated, by eliminating the witness requirement, and more accessible, by requiring instructions in additional languages and instituting a statewide system of drop boxes. Finally, its early voting provisions are a breakthrough. Permitting early voting statewide at accessible (and extended) hours in more convenient locations will make voting easier in every county in Minnesota.

Second, while this bill makes voting easier for everyone, we appreciate, in particular, the ways it will improve access for those who have too often had a harder time casting their ballot. For example:

- **Working people** will benefit from drop boxes and early voting locations that are open during an evening and on weekends.
- **Low-income Minnesotans** will be more likely to be registered due to the automatic voter registration provisions.
- **Young people** will be more likely to register and vote because of the pre-registration provisions.
- **Students** will have an easier time casting a ballot with the updates to our same day registration photo identification requirements.

- **Seniors** will have a simpler time voting, if they choose to become permanent absentee voters.
- **Minnesotans who reside on reservations**, but whose addresses are not recognized by the U.S. Postal Service, now have a clear way to register.
- **Renters** will benefit from being permitted to use a wider array of address verification documents if they need to same-day register.
- **Those who speak English as a second language** will be better able to vote absentee with instructions printed in their first languages.
- **Voters with disabilities** will be ensured accessible voting stations at early vote locations, if this bill becomes law.
- **Minnesota's soldiers** will have an easier time registering on Election Day using their military or veterans photo identification.

Third, the restoration of voting rights to formerly incarcerated Minnesotans is a long-overdue, bipartisan proposal. Over 50,000 Minnesotans deserve the chance to participate again. All other Minnesotans will benefit from their increased engagement and active contributions to our democracy.

Fourth, House File 9 protects Minnesotans from voter intimidation, voting-related deceptive practices, and voter interference. These provisions are an important way to safeguard voters and protect our democracy from individuals who would trample on other's rights.

Fifth, election administration should be nonpartisan and impartial. Our Secretary of State should be bottom-line responsible for its successes and failures. The holder of that constitutional office should be held accountable at the ballot box, through legislative oversight, and, when needed, via the courts. However, to ensure the system as whole is functional and adequately funded, we should make sure federally prescribed funding, like that in the Help America Vote Act account, can be used in a timely and transparent way. We should appropriate these funds to the Secretary of State's office to **make sure state and local election officials have the funds they need to make our election system more effective for all Minnesota voters.**

Voting is a powerful thing. It's the act that makes political power legitimate. If enacted, House File 9 would strengthen our democracy and our state. We encourage members of this committee to support this bill. People just like you have endorsed it.

Signed,

AFSCME Council 5
 COPAL- Comunidades Organizando el Poder y La Accion Latina
 Education Minnesota
 Faith in Minnesota
 ISIAAH

Junket: Tossed & Found
Land Stewardship Action Fund
Land Stewardship Project
Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light
Minnesota Nurses Association
MN350
Muslim American Society of Minnesota
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
Northern Lights.mn
Our Stories. Our Health.
SEIU Healthcare Minnesota
SEIU Minnesota State Council
TakeAction Minnesota
Unidos MN
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