

To the Committee Chair and Members,

I am writing to support both HF3499 and also the amendment H3499A5. Both are essential to protecting MN voters during the upcoming elections this year, which are so very essential to the health of our national and state democracies.

HF3499 will allocate HAVA account monies "to the secretary of state for the purposes of improving the administration and security of elections as authorized by federal law", via several specified actions. These funds are urgently needed to assure that voting can occur during the ongoing Covid pandemic, ongoing attacks from state and other actors abroad, and other known (and as yet unknown) threats. Voting protection is essential, must start immediately, and must be sustained through the elections. This will cost money, and these funds are earmarked for just such activities. Their deployment in this way now will prevent greater costs down the road related to election-exposed voters getting sick, and to later-imposed and so more costly interventions only made close to dates of the elections. Their allocation as proposed is self-evidently warranted. Arguments to the contrary are arguments against safe elections in MN, and must not be heeded.

H3499A5 specifies that the actions to be covered by the law will include "(1) conduct of the election primarily by mail according to section 204B.45, subdivision (2), provided that a schedule for reasonable public notice and ballot delivery may be directed by the secretary based on the circumstances of the outbreak.". Again, the need is most evident. Voting in person during the pandemic--which is now projected to last 1-2 more years in some fashion, unless an effective vaccine is deployed sooner--risks the health of voters, and so of those who are in contact with them.

There is already precedent for mail voting in MN, where about 1/4 of votes are already done by mail. Thousands of small precincts in Greater MN vote only by mail, as allowed by existing law. Deployed service members routinely vote by mail. The cost of mail balloting is likely to be lower than that of in person balloting in the time of Covid; even if its costs are not lower, they are an inexpensive investment in the prevention of dangerous and costly disease. Their allocation will reassure voters that the legislature cares about them.

Appropriate protections will be needed for those unable to vote by mail due to late moves, residences on reservations and other locals without proper addresses, those who need translation help, etc. Locales can provide these protections.

Those who argue that mail voting is unsafe are, at best, disingenuous. They do not argue that existing mail balloting should cease. They do not argue that taxes should not be paid by mail. Many themselves vote by mail. Further, they know that voter fraud is very very very rare. At worst, those arguments are actually a dog whistle that says that some voters--who may vote less by mail now or may be at heightened risk of severe disease if exposed--will vote more in upcoming elections if they are made fully available by mail, which could be bad news for some political sectors. Such arguments--whether disingenuous or mal-intended--must not be heeded this debate.

I urge passage of these bills immediately.

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