



March 6, 2024

Chair & Senator Jim Carlson
Senate Elections Committee
c/o Beth Fraser, Committee Administrator
Room 1200, Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Ave W
St Paul, MN 55103

Re: Testimony regarding SF 3994, Minnesota Voting Rights Act

Dear Chair Carlson and Members of the Senate Elections Committee,

The League of Women Voters of Minnesota is proud to be nonpartisan, neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties at any level of government, but always working on vital issues of concern to members and the public. Together, we envision a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate, and every eligible voter is able to freely access the ballot and have their voices heard.

LWV Minnesota supports SF 3994, Minnesota Voting Rights Act, with comment:

The League of Women Voters believes the right to vote of every citizen should be protected and their voices be heard and represented. LWV has long supported the Voting Rights Act of 1965, including protecting and expanding protection of the voting rights and representation of minority groups and language minorities. Court decisions over the last 10 years have significantly narrowed the protection provided by this landmark legislation. The recent decision by the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals limiting who may file suits for violations of the Voting Rights Act presents a potentially significant and virtually unprecedented reduction in the effectiveness of the law. The Department of Justice has limited resources, which are determined by Congress, and the focus and priority of the federal Justice Department can vary dramatically between administrations. If this decision stands, it would be left to politically-appointed federal Justice Department leaders to determine whether and how to challenge potential violations of the Voting Rights Act.

For these reasons, above all others, Minnesota voters need SF3994. The individual right to bring a legal complaint in Minnesota in cases of voting rights challenges is critically important. Notably, this bill requires a presuit notice which provides a valuable opportunity to address voting rights concerns without the cost and burden of court action. The bill also includes specific language regarding voter suppression and vote dilution to enable both voters and courts to understand what these are when they need to be addressed.

SF 3994 raises the potential that cities' existing "method of election", specifically city councils with at-large versus ward representation, could be found in violation of the Minnesota Voting Rights Act and require change. There currently does not exist a path for a statutory city to adopt wards without the creation of a city charter. LWVMN suggests that the bill provide for creation of city wards without a charter, including input and participation by the voters in the city, and requiring a vote by residents to approve the new form of government, similar to other changes in the form of city government cover by Minnesota Statutes Chapter 410 and 412.

LWV Minnesota requests that you adopt additional language on voter-supported city ward formation and vote YES on SF 3994.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Huffman", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Paul Huffman, Election and Redistricting Policy Coordinator
League of Women Voters of Minnesota

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