



April 6, 2022

Honorable Senator Julie Rosen, Chair
Senate State Government Finance and Policy and Elections Committee
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 2113
95 University Ave. W
St. Paul, MN 55155

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Senator Rosen,

As you consider Senate File 3975, which contains State Government appropriations provisions, I urge the Committee to reconsider the exclusion of proposals from the Governor's Budget recommendations that are intended to address critical cybersecurity and information technology modernization needs within the State's executive branch agencies. The proposed change items for Minnesota IT Services (MNIT) that were included in those recommendations are intended to address increasingly urgent threats in the area of cybersecurity while making targeted investments in technology modernization at both the infrastructure and application level – positioning Minnesota to leverage the power of cloud technologies to reduce operational risk and provide a secure, scalable foundation for state service delivery transformation.

Minnesotans expect government services that are secure, easy-to-access, and that promote the efficient delivery of services and use of taxpayer dollars. Senate File 3975 fails to meet these expectations from Minnesotans – and the demands of operating mission-critical technology systems in the midst of a rapidly-evolving cyber threat landscape – by omitting the Governor's proposed investments in the area of information technology. As the State's Chief Information Officer, it is my responsibility to express my serious concerns with the exclusion of these investments from Senate File 3975.

Over the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed the increasing central role of technology in our daily lives and the need for rapid technology solutioning when emergencies occur. We have also witnessed the continued evolution of cyber threats originating from criminal networks, nation-states, and geo-political conflicts. The significant technology debt that the State carries in the form of aging technology not only hampers efficient and effective engagement with Minnesotans and our external partners, it also puts at risk the delivery of critical government services. Now is the time to address these threats and lay a modern technology foundation through targeted investments in an accelerated move to the cloud, application modernization, and the implementation of advanced cyber tools. The choice is clear. Minnesota can accept increasing cyber risk and the constraints that aging technology puts on our ability to innovate, or we can make a significant leap forward in securing and modernizing our technology environments and transforming the way Minnesotans interact with their government.

I want to specifically highlight concerns with the omission in the bill of State matching dollars that are required to leverage \$18 million in Federal funds for the State and Local Cybersecurity Improvement Act, a grant program that focuses on providing cybersecurity risk mitigation to county and municipal governments. Any delays to establishing this grant program puts Minnesotans and their local governments at higher risk of experiencing the adverse effects of cyber-attacks at a time when federal agencies such as the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency are stressing the need for investment and vigilance in the face of a cyber-threat landscape heightened by ongoing geopolitical conflict.

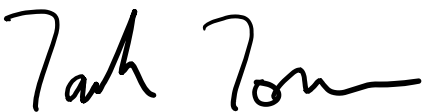
County and local governments are eager to join MNIT in collaboratively mitigating cybersecurity risk, and this funding is crucial to accomplishing that shared goal.

I also want to register my concern with the omission in Senate File 3975 of sustainable funding for the State's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. Like any large, complex organization, the State's ERP system serves as the financial and human resources backbone of state operations, and its continued maintenance and support is critical to the secure, efficient, and effective operations of state government. Without sustainable funding as recommended by the Governor and the Office of the Legislative Auditor, the State will be unable to responsibly maintain these systems, keep current with vendor upgrade and patching cycles, and ensure appropriate resilience and recovery capabilities are in place to support prudent management of the State's financial and human resources.

Lastly, I would like to raise concerns with provisions in the bill related to livestreaming of election-related activities. The language would require that MNIT maintain video archives and provide public access via the web to thousands of hours of video data from ballot drop box locations and absentee ballot handling locations that may contain private data. Senate File 3975 fails to fully fund the technology and storage needs associated with managing and providing access to this volume of data over time. In addition, it is unclear in the bill what entity would be serving as the data owner – that is, the entity with the appropriate subject matter expertise and authority to make determinations about data classification and data redaction. While the bill states that the MNIT Commissioner "may obscure private data," it fails to provide the resources necessary for what would be a highly labor-intensive process of video review and redaction or obfuscation.

It is my responsibility to relentlessly advocate for the ways that technology can improve outcomes for the people of Minnesota. With the threat of cybersecurity attacks elevated as a result of geopolitical events and the demand for effective digital government services greater than ever before, we should all recognize that now is the time to make investments in technology that help secure and transform the way that state government serves Minnesotans. Minnesota IT Services is committed to working with you and other members of the Senate Finance Committee to enable this transformation and live up to our responsibilities as state leaders to protect Minnesotans, their data, and the services upon which they rely.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tarek Tomes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tarek" being more prominent than the last name "Tomes".

Tarek Tomes
Commissioner and State Chief Information Officer

CC: Senator Mary Kiffmeyer, Chair, Senate State Government Finance and Policy and Elections Committee
Senator Jim Carlson, Ranking Member, Senate State Government Finance and Policy and Elections Committee
Senator Mark Koran, Chair, Senate Technology and Reform Policy Committee
Senator Lindsey Port, Ranking Member, Senate Technology and Reform Policy Committee