



The Office of
Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison

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January 17, 2023

Senator Bobby Joe Champion, President of the Senate
95 University Avenue W.
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3401
Saint Paul MN 55155

Dear Senator Champion,

I wish I were able to testify in person at the Senate Elections Committee hearing today to speak in favor of SF 26, the Restore The Vote bill that you have authored to automatically restore voting rights when people leave prison: instead, I am on the road to Bemidji for the second public hearing my office is holding to seek public input on the proposed merger of Fairview Health Systems and Sanford Health, as part of our investigation into the proposed merger. Nevertheless, I write to express my strongest support for the bill.

As you know, 21 states — including our border state of North Dakota — automatically restore a resident's right to vote upon release from prison, as your bill would do. I see no legitimate reason to bar Minnesotans who are no longer incarcerated from participating in our democracy. Indeed, two states — Maine and Vermont — and the District of Columbia have never deprived the vote to their residents based on incarceration. I know from experience that participation in our democracy provides people with a greater reason to remain law-abiding. People who participate in our democracy feel a greater stake in our society: rather than being barred from society, they should be encouraged to participate.

When I was a state representative in 2003, I introduced a bill to restore the vote. It did not pass at the time. I am grateful to you for introducing it again 20 years later. With the passage of this bill, more people will have a stake in remaining law-abiding and building a better society, and all Minnesotans will be safer.

Sincerely,

Keith Ellison
Attorney General

cc: Senator Jim Carlson, Senate Elections Committee Chair
Senator Bonnie Westlin, Vice Chair
Senator Mark Koran, Ranking Minority Member
Senator Bruce Anderson
Senator Calvin Bahr
Senator Liz Boldon
Senator Steve Cwodzinski
Senator Gene Dornink
Senator Warren Limmer
Senator John Marty
Senator Andrew Mathews
Senator Nicole Mitchell
Senator Lindsey Port
Senator Ann Rest