

January 14, 2023

Senator Jim Carlson, Chair
Senator Bonnie Westlin, Co-Chair
Senate Elections Committee

RE: SF26 – Right to vote restoration to individuals convicted of a felony upon completion of any term of incarceration imposed and executed by a court for the offense

Dear Senators Carlson and Westlin,

I am writing to express my strong support for SF26, which would restore the right to vote to individuals convicted of a felony upon completion of incarceration. Current Minnesota law creates a form of second-class citizenship, reminiscent of Jim Crow laws, made up of formerly incarcerated individuals who are living and working in our communities but who are denied the right to vote. There are approximately 50,000 formerly incarcerated Minnesotans who pay local, state, and federal taxes but who cannot vote to decide who will represent them as elected officials, or use the vote to express their views on critical issues such as tax levies and referenda. Denial of voting rights to formerly incarcerated individuals disproportionately disenfranchises people of color, and is repugnant to our notion of democracy, in which every citizen who has reached voting age is assured the right to vote, and cannot be denied the right to vote based on skin color, gender or economic status.

Restoration of the right to vote to formerly incarcerated individuals would remove a major obstacle to full reintegration of these people into our communities, and thereby benefit all of us. I urge the Committee to approve SF26, and block any amendments designed to deny the restoration of voting rights to individuals convicted of certain felonies, or to impose financial obligations on those seeking restoration of the right to vote.

Respectfully,

Clifford E. Kashtan, MD
St. Louis Park, MN