



February 23, 2023

Senator Jim Carlson, Chair
Minnesota Senate Elections Committee
Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Avenue W
Saint Paul, MN 55103

Chair Carlson and Members,

I write today to express the strong support of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party for Senate File 1827, adjusting the threshold for major party status in Minnesota. This common-sense bill addresses a problem of increasing significance from recent elections.

The Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party is the political home for millions of Minnesota voters. With over 3,500 elected party leaders across 118 local organizing units, we are the largest political organization in the State of Minnesota. We routinely represent hundreds of candidates and elected officials in each election and at all levels of government.

Every state and territory in the United States has the right to place reasonable limits on ballot access for candidates seeking public office, and every state and territory avail themselves of this right. These limits serve the interests of voters by keeping ballots manageable and ensuring that candidates demonstrate a minimal level of public support when running for public office. These limits routinely include filing fees, petition requirements, or formal statements of candidacy.

Minnesota is one of nineteen states that delineates between major and minor political parties. This delineation recognizes that certain political organizations have demonstrated viability through size of membership, strength of organization, and past electoral success. Major parties in Minnesota receive certain benefits and bear certain obligations including access to public financing, preferred ballot placement, and streamlined access for their candidates to the ballot. Major parties also play a crucial role in Minnesota elections in recruiting election judges, educating and mobilizing voters, and endorsing candidates through the caucus and convention process.

Of these nineteen states, Minnesota is tied with five other states with lowest threshold to gain and maintain major party status – currently requiring a party's statewide candidates to receive merely five percent of the statewide vote. Other states, including both Democratic and Republican states like Colorado and Texas, set their threshold as high as twenty percent. It is

time for Minnesota to join the majority of these states in setting a more reasonable ten percent threshold for major party status.

Our lax ballot access standards have manifested several problems in recent elections. Certain organizations granted major party status lacked the structure to adequately vet or endorse candidates running under their banner. Candidates have been able to take advantage of streamlined ballot access even though they made no effort to raise funds or build campaign organizations. This serves neither the current statutory intent nor the best interests of Minnesota citizens.

The Minnesota DFL believes that our democracy is best served when our citizens participate, including choosing to run for office. Candidates choosing not to run under the banner of a major party can, and routinely do, still access the ballot. However, by requiring those candidates to first gather a nominal number of signatures from registered voters in their district, we better serve the interests of Minnesota voters by ensuring their ballots are not cluttered with candidates in name only. Additionally, Minnesota taxpayers are better served by ensuring that our system of public finance is limited to those candidates and parties for whom it was intended.

The Minnesota DFL greatly appreciates Senator Carlson for bringing forward this bill. It is a simple solution to a very real problem. We strongly encourage the members of the committee to support Senate File 1827 and increase the threshold for major party status in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Ken Martin, Chair
Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party