

Thank you for the chance to be heard on Senate File 1827. I am Oliver Steinberg, a resident of St. Paul. I'm the chairman of the Grassroots - Legalize Cannabis Party, which is a political party in our state established at my suggestion in 1986. This afternoon I am speaking only as an individual citizen, and not as the party spokesman.

This bill tries to address a glaring flaw in our state elections laws, involving the issue of ballot access for major party, minor party, and independent candidates.

Our defective ballot access law has been an embarrassment in the past. A fugitive from justice has filed for office several times on major party ballot lines. A person serving a prison term for murder has placed his name on the ballot. Vanity candidates routinely file for statewide office, quite literally buying their way onto the ballot.

And since the 2018 election, this malfunctioning law has enabled partisans of one major party to perpetrate systematic election fraud in Minnesota, and it has also led partisans of another party to unethically meddle in the internal affairs of a third party.

BACKGROUND: Under the present law, independent and minor party candidates are nominated by petition. If a candidate receives over 1% of the statewide vote, including a vote from every county, that candidate's party becomes qualified as a minor party and is eligible for the public campaign fund check-off and political contribution refund.

If a candidate receives over 5% of the statewide vote, including at least one from each county, then his or her party is classified as a major political party. *Major party candidates can be listed on the ballot simply by paying a filing fee and submitting an affidavit of candidacy. No nominating petition signatures are required.*

In the 2018 election, both the Grassroots - Legalize Cannabis Party and a schismatic splinter from it called the Legal Marijuana Now Party each had a statewide candidate who polled over 5% of the votes--and both achieved major party status--on paper. But their 200,000-plus protest votes didn't reflect any organizational substance. Neither party was "ready for prime time." They weren't ready to field more than a handful of candidates--but nevertheless, every partisan race on the ballot for the next two elections would now be open to anyone who paid a small fee and filed as one of their candidates.

In 2020, at least eight Trump party activists and supporters decided to file on the new party ballot lines in several legislative and congressional swing districts. These bogus candidates were people who had no background with either of the newly elevated parties, and no record of advocacy for their chief issue of cannabis legalization. Several of them were connected with the Trump party's State Senate caucus.

There is no penalty for lying on the Affidavit of Candidacy, so the two legalization parties had no remedy in the law to repel these political poachers. While the Trump Party politicians have been spinning lies and spouting fantasies about non-existent "voter fraud," their own adherents have been openly, flagrantly, even gleefully committing systematic "candidate fraud." Credit for exposing this deceit goes to J. Patrick Coolican and the *Minnesota Reformer*.

In 2022, the fraud was repeated. In my opinion, the Legal Marijuana Party has chosen to become a functional subsidiary of the Trump Party, and therefore is now serving as an accomplice and tool of prohibitionism.

Also in 2022, a small clique of Democratic-Farmer-Laborites tried to nullify the Grassroots - Legalize Cannabis Party. Several DFL legislators begged me to have our party change its name and pretend to be an extreme right-wing outfit. Failing to fob off that silly scheme on us, another approach was taken with the connivance of turncoats who had infiltrated into the Grassroots Party on purpose--as they admitted--to wreck it. This conspiracy was well underway until a tape recording of one of their Zoom meetings was made public on You Tube.

That plan to wreck the Grassroots party fizzled, but it managed to distract the party from recruiting and filing its own preferred candidates. Meanwhile, an individual with no attachment to or sympathy for the party had filed for Governor on the Grassroots ticket--a guy who told me point-blank that his intent was to "hijack the party."

If, as proposed, the threshold for major party status is raised from 5% to 10% of the vote, that will make it more difficult for under-organized parties to achieve automatic ballot status. This will protect minor parties from the kind of deliberate, blatant fraud perpetrated by the Trump partisans, or the kind of back-stabbing skullduggery attempted by those DFL zealots, or from being sabotaged by egotistic political hijackers.

I support the 10% reform for Section 200.02, Subd. 7(a)(2), but not for Subd. 7(c), where it would be excessive and punitive. **However, the proposed reform doesn't solve--doesn't even address--the real problem, which is that there's no recourse when a spoiler candidate files a dishonest affidavit of candidacy.** The solution I'd recommend is to require ALL candidates, in the major parties and the minor parties as well, to circulate nominating petitions.

This is the best way to keep nuisance candidates out of every party's primaries; this is the logical way to deter hostile intruders or crackpots from filing in districts where a party's presence or support is minimal; this timely reform would take effect before the 2024 election campaign; this reform would be a useful albeit compulsory exercise of direct communication with constituents; and finally, since this would apply to all, this is probably the only way to make ballot access more restrictive without its being seen as just a DFL maneuver for a possibly self-serving political advantage.