



STATE OF MINNESOTA
Office of Minnesota Secretary of State
Steve Simon

March 28, 2023

Senate Elections Committee
Minnesota State Senate
2100 Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55155-1606

Dear Senate Elections Committee Members:

I write in support of Senate File 1636, as amended by the A-11 amendment. This legislation makes critical investments in our election system and includes several important reforms that have been heard by this committee; reforms that will improve the voting experience for Minnesota's voters and create efficiencies in the voting process for elections administrators.

First, I want to thank Chair Carlson for providing the funding in this request to support the work of the Office of Secretary of State (OSS) Elections Division, as well as the needed funding to meet the Help America Vote Act required state match. The required \$461,000 in state match funding will release \$2,302,224 in federal HAVA funds. These funds are critical to supporting OSS cybersecurity and infrastructure needs, as well as allowing the OSS to assist in improving local government election security through grant funding and our security navigator program. The funding provisions of this legislation also provide much needed resources to local governments in the form of grants to improve polling place accessibility.

From a policy perspective, this legislation provides for an early voting process that will streamline the procedure for elections administrators and will provide increased access for voters. Early voting reduces unnecessary paperwork that currently is required by the in-person absentee voting process. The legislature made strides in improving this process in past sessions by allowing for what we call a "direct-balloting" process, but the present early voting legislation further reduces the paperwork required of a voter and instead requires voters to complete the same certifications that they are required to complete on election day. The legislation also expands the hours for in-person voting prior to election day. I recognize that this creates increased work for elections administrators across the state, but the limited additional hours required in this legislation in state general elections will provide important access to voters and move Minnesota closer in line with other states that have robust early voting programs.

Included in the policy provisions is also legislation expanding the ability of local governments to adopt Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). This legislation would allow local jurisdictions conducting elections in the odd year to move to RCV, and establishes a task force to determine how best to allow local option RCV in the even year. The task force would also be charged with examining what it would take to move Minnesota to a statewide RCV system if the legislature were to adopt statewide RCV. This legislation has undergone significant and positive changes as it has moved through the committee process, and incorporates much of the feedback requested by elections administrators. As I have said, the details in election administration matter, so it is important that the taskforce be led by elections administrators to ensure that we are addressing and considering all of the needed changes to ensure we are maintaining the integrity of our election system. As this bill moves forward, I would ask this committee to consider requiring that the co-chair of the taskforce not only be an elections administrator, but that the person be a county administrator chosen by the Minnesota Association of County Officers (MACO). The taskforce will need strong county leadership as it examines the changes necessary to our election system to administer RCV at the local level during a state general election, or if the legislature decides to adopt RCV for state and federal elections.

Finally, I want to note one provision that is not in this bill but will support its reforms: Senator Rest's Senate File 1548, which is traveling separately. Senate File 1548 provides necessary resources to Minnesota's local election officials, including county, city, and township administrators. The important reforms that this committee is advancing this session will improve access for voters, expand the freedom to vote, and modernize many of our systems. But these reforms come with implementation costs at the local level, and the costs of running Minnesota's election systems continue to increase even without these changes. I ask that this committee continue to support Senate File 1548 to ensure that as we invest in elections at the state level, we make the needed investments in our local election partners as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Simon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Simon
SECRETARY OF STATE

C: Senator Morrison