



February 6, 2023

Chair & Senator John Marty  
Senate Finance Committee  
c/o Elspeth Cavert, Committee Administrator  
3235 Minnesota Senate Bldg.  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

**Re: Testimony in Support of SF 26**

Dear Chair Marty and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

The League of Women Voters of Minnesota is proud to be nonpartisan, neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties at any level of government, but always working on vital issues of concern to members and the public. We envision a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate.

**LWV Minnesota supports the restoration of voting rights as described in SF26 because:**

- The effort to restore voting rights to Minnesota citizens serving felony sentences immediately upon release, giving them a voice in their community, has been supported on a bipartisan basis over the past decade.
- Restoring voting rights also restores humanity to people as they are being welcomed back into their communities, giving them deeper ties that makes them less likely to reoffend and to live productive lives.<sup>1</sup>
- Restoration of Voting Rights impacts all Minnesotans - More than 55,000 Minnesotans from across the state, including an estimated 70 percent from Greater Minnesota; a diverse group of people including 35,700 white people, 12,240 African Americans, 3,060 people who are Latinx and 3,060 Native Americans (*numbers as of 2019*); and a disproportionate number of African American Minnesotans, who are seven times more likely to be disenfranchised than white Minnesotans.

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Padraic Hamilton-Smith and Matt Vogel, *The Violence of Voicelessness: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement on Recidivism*, 22 La Raza L.J. (2015).  
<https://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1252&context=blrlj>

- SF26 will make our election system less complicated and will reduce election administration burden and costs.
  - The 2012 Task Force on Election Integrity report concluded that there was significant confusion and frustration among the public, among individuals convicted of felonies, and among election judges and administrators on when re-enfranchisement occurs.<sup>2</sup>
  - The 2018 Office of the Legislative Auditor report on voter registration highlights the ongoing challenge of maintaining accurate voting roles, especially in the complicated situation of felony convictions.<sup>3</sup>

SF26 creates a bright, clear line that is easy for voters and election judges to understand. It reduces election confusion, will improve the integrity of our elections, and will further enfranchise all formerly incarcerated Minnesotans, including those who are currently eligible to vote, but are either reluctant to participate or do not participate because of fear or confusion about our current law.

**We urge you to vote YES on SF26.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Witte". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michelle" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Witte".

Michelle Witte, Executive Director  
League of Women Voters of Minnesota

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<sup>2</sup> First Interim Report and Initial Recommendation of Task for on Election Integrity. (2012).  
<https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2012/other/120134.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Voter Registration, Office of the Legislative Auditor. (2018).  
<https://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/2018/voterreg.htm>