

January 30, 2023

Chair Murphy and Members of the Committee,

I have served as the Deputy Director of Minnesota Voice and on the Saint Paul School Board, both opportunities that have shown me how important it is to center the voices of youth and those traditionally excluded from political processes. Which is why I am writing in support of SF 194 and the establishment of a youth advisory council. We know that when our young people are engaged and understand the importance of being civically engaged they are more likely to participate in all aspects of democracy. The best way to engage students, is to show them the work. The Minnesota Youth Council (MYC) has filled the void between educating young people on how our government works and actively engaging legislators and students on matters important to young people. The Council and the students who have served on it have frequently shown that they are able and willing to do more than offer testimony. They are ready to do the work and to bring as many young people into decision-making spaces as possible.

I spent several years working directly with the MYC and I saw firsthand the way their interactions with legislators and state agencies impacted the work. They were able to bring perspectives that as adults we sometimes miss. They could connect with students in a way that staff simply can't. I think the most impactful thing we can do if we want to engage with young people is to listen and learn from them. That's how we reach them. This bill provides us an opportunity to continue to do just that. To ask students what is that they need and to work with them to develop recommendations to get there. It allows the state to engage with students from Bemidji to Rochester and so many places in between. Some of the best young organizers I've witnessed have come from the MYC. They are driven and smart and they come from all of our communities. We're investing not in just a select few Minnesotans, but students from every walk of life in our state.

Like so many others, I have been positively impacted by the guidance of our students. I've had the privilege of learning from them and I encourage this body to continue that work. Continue to learn and grow and be questioned by young people, you might just find that you're clearer and more committed than you were before. I'm excited to see this bill move forward and I look forward to seeing what comes next from Minnesota's youth should it pass.

Sincerely,

Halla Henderson