



March 16, 2023

Chair Scott Dibble, Senator Jennifer McEwen
Transportation Committee
Minnesota Senate Building
95 University Avenue W.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Dibble, Senator McEwen, and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Minnesota Conservative Energy Forum (MnCEF), a non-profit education and advocacy organization that promotes an “all-of-the-above” energy strategy for Minnesota. We encourage policymakers to embrace innovations in clean and affordable energy based on our conservative principles such as economic growth, property rights, personal stewardship, job growth, and national security.

We at MnCEF are pleased to support Sen. Jennifer McEwen’s bill, SF 2591, which would ensure that entities receiving a route permit under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 216E are allowed to use public rights-of-way (ROWs) for high voltage transmission lines if they are interconnecting with facilities of an entity that provides retail electric services in the state.

Some of our top priorities at MnCEF include educating Minnesotans on policies that would increase transmission infrastructure, including streamlining Minnesota’s permitting process to make it easier and more efficient for entities to develop renewable energy projects in Minnesota. SF 2591 is a step toward that goal in two ways. First, the bill streamlines the permitting process, and second, we believe it will also have the beneficial result of reducing controversy in some communities with respect to renewable energy developments.

We believe that clean energy projects bring numerous benefits to the communities in which they are located, a few of which include:

1. Significant direct investment into local communities by developers,
2. Significant investment into local economies,
3. Investment into local economies created by a “ripple effect” of workers spending their hard-earned dollars across industries like hotels, restaurants, banks, car repair shops, and many others,
4. Ongoing income generated for local governments via wind and solar production taxes,
5. Stable income for landowners and securing the future of local family farms through land use agreements with developers.

We understand that not everyone agrees. There is often a divide within communities in Greater Minnesota, with some people seeing these and other benefits, while others view renewable energy projects as an eyesore on the landscape and harmful to their way of life, disruptive to agriculture, and taking prime farmland out of production.

But whether people support or oppose the actual wind turbines or solar panels, often it is the transmission line route that presents the biggest hurdle and can set projects back months, even years, or kill a project altogether.

As such, by ensuring qualified entities are allowed access to public ROWs, not only would it work toward streamlining permitting at the state level, but it would mitigate much of the heartburn at the local level by reducing, or eliminating, in some instances, the need to use county and township ROWs. MnCEF believes landowners should be able to decide what to do with their land, whether that is to use it for renewable energy projects or for another purpose. SF 2591 would reduce the need to secure private agreements, helping to make sure projects are not prevented from being built because of issues siting transmission lines.

In addition to the relief that this bill would provide for projects being currently developed in Minnesota, we know that the United States is facing a transmission crisis. The “backbone” of our energy system is aging, and there is not enough being built to transmit the ever-increasing demand for power.

As the pursuit of cleaner forms of energy has intensified, particularly with the explicit goal of Minnesota getting 100% of its energy from clean resources by 2040, action needs to be taken now. This bill is necessary for us to build out and replace transmission infrastructure. If clean energy projects are held up by bureaucratic confusion, the projects will not be built, and the market demand (to say nothing of Minnesota law) will not be met.

These are just a few reasons why it is critical that the committee and legislature pass SF 2591 and provide clarity that non-utility electric providers are allowed to access public ROWs, and we ask for your support.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with you on meeting Minnesota’s energy goals and ensuring a clean energy future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kayla Christensen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kayla" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Christensen".

Kayla Christensen
Executive Director
Minnesota Conservative Energy Forum