

January 31, 2023

Members of the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee:

NAMI Minnesota supports SF 26 to allow people with felonies to vote when they are not incarcerated. For a number of reasons, people with mental illnesses are overrepresented in our criminal legal system. Many people have experienced the criminalization of their symptoms, while others have been accused and convicted of more serious crimes. Regardless of how they enter the system, we know that people involved with the criminal legal system experience long term collateral consequences. For people with mental illnesses, collateral consequences play a constant role in the journey to recovery.

As people either serve their sentence under community supervision or prepare to reenter the community from incarceration, working toward recovery is critically important. NAMI Minnesota supports SF 26 because we see the right to vote as an essential piece of providing hope for recovery. Connection is a pillar of recovery, and civic engagement can provide meaning and a sense of connection to shared values and community. In addition to the many other good reasons to restore people's right to vote, not least of which is working to correct systemic racism, we support this bill for the positive impact it will have on the lives of people with mental illnesses. Thank you for hearing this important bill and we urge you to pass SF 26.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director

Elliot Butay  
Senior Policy Coordinator