



February 19, 2024

Hon. Jim Carlson
Chair, Senate Elections Committee
3221 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chairman Carlson and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Fair Elections Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers to registration and voting through advocacy and impact litigation, and the Center's Campus Vote Project, a national organization to educate and engage young voters on voting rights issues and institutionalize civic engagement at university and college campuses, we write to express our support for SF 3616 and the amended language added in the House version, HF 3447, that will also permit student government organizations of postsecondary institutions to request temporary polling locations on their campus.

Students often face significant hurdles to participating in democracy. Logistical and systemic barriers unique to student and young voters, coupled with a lack of access to and awareness of information regarding registering and voting, often make civic participation significantly more difficult for this demographic. For example, college-aged people are some of the least likely to own a car and many do not have driver's licenses at all.¹ This—in addition to their unfamiliarity with community locations outside of campus—can make it very difficult for them to reach off-campus voting sites, particularly in jurisdictions that lack reliable public transportation options.

SF 3616 as proposed would be an important step toward reducing these barriers for student voters by making it possible for postsecondary institutions to request that county auditors establish on-campus temporary voting locations. This will give agency to school administrators—who better understand the needs of their student body—to seek out more accessible opportunities to vote for their own campus community. We do also support the language added to the House companion to SF 3616 that would additionally permit "student government organization[s] of postsecondary institutions" to file requests for temporary polling locations in addition to the institution itself. This addition will empower representatives of the student body on each campus to request a temporary voting location on behalf of their peers, rather than being solely reliant on campus administrators to request one.

¹ See, e.g., Christopher Kruz et al., The Young and the Carless? The Demographics of New Vehicle Purchases, Fed. Reserve (Jun. 24, 2016), <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econresdata/notes/feds-notes/2016/the-young-and-the-carless-the-demographics-of-new-vehicle-purchases-20160624.html>.



Importantly, creating temporary locations on campuses of postsecondary institutions does not only benefit students. For example, in addition to the number of school faculty and staff on-campus polling locations could serve, people with disabilities may also benefit from county auditors being able to establish additional temporary polling locations on postsecondary institution campuses. Accessibility, including sufficient parking and accessible infrastructure, is vital to increasing participation in elections among voters with disabilities. Postsecondary institutions can often provide modernized, ADA-compliant facilities, making them helpful voting locations in communities with few accessible options, and benefitting voters beyond just the student population.

Although we support this bill and the House version for the reasons stated above, we would recommend slightly altering the language of the House version passed out of Committee that states requests for temporary polling locations are “valid only for that election.” Amending that specific language to state that a “request must be made at least 53 days before an election and is valid **for all remaining elections in that cycle**,” would ensure such requests need not be filed for each primary and general election but may be filed 53 days prior to any election in a cycle.

SF 3616, along with the language added in the House version and our proposed amended language noted above, will be an important measure to increase and encourage civic participation among college students and other eligible voters in Minnesota. Making voting more accessible to communities that face significant barriers to voting is crucial to make our democracy more representative of the people that it serves. If you would like further information or have any questions, please contact me at the email address below.

Sincerely,

Patrick Williamson

Counsel

Fair Elections Center

1825 K St. NW, Ste. 701

Washington, DC 20006

pwilliamson@fairelectionscenter.org