



Chair Jim Carlson
95 University Avenue West
Minnesota Senate Building, 3221
St. Paul, MN 55115

March 12, 2024

RE: SF 4951 Requirements to fill a vacancy in the office of school board member modified.

Dear Chair Carlson:

The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) is pleased to offer our support for SF 4951 which modifies the requirements of a school board when filling a vacancy. We also thank Vice Chair Westlin for sponsoring the bill. The changes in SF 4951 will help public school districts by preventing costly and labor-intensive special elections from being held in off years after a board member resigns. Because they are outside of general election years, school districts must run these elections themselves. School districts do not have any dedicated funding to run elections so they must be paid for with the general fund, taking money out of the classroom.

Historically, there have only been a handful of school board resignations each year. Unfortunately, these vacancies have become far more common and school boards have more unexpected resignations than any other elected office. There were 82 vacancies in 2020, 48 vacancies in 2022 and another 44 vacancies in 2023.

According to data collected by MSBA, the average cost to a school district for an off year special election is approximately \$10,000 per election. Across the state, that's well over \$300,000 lost to pay for special elections which often have very low voter turnout.

For almost six decades, if a board member resigned, school boards were able to appoint a community member to fill the position until the next election cycle, a commonsense way to handle the large number of vacancies that can happen on school boards. This approach saves that special elections money for what it is supposed to do; help educate all of our students.

The appointment process allows boards to give opportunities to a wide range of community members to get experience serving their local schools. Examples include appointing community members who reflect the make-up of the students in a district or perhaps community members who may not run because they think they don't fully know the

campaign process or may not be able to afford the cost of a campaign. The appointment can then be an interim process where the community can watch how an appointed member serves the school district. If the appointed member runs for election, the community has the opportunity to vote in the election.

MSBA also supports this bill's change in requirements when a school board member resigns less than 90 days prior to the end of the term, the board may, but is not required to, fill the vacancy by board appointment. Given the 30-day waiting period that is required after the resolution to appoint is approved, a board may do all the work of appointing to have a newly appointed board member serve at only one meeting before the end of a term. We appreciate this local control and flexibility.

Thank you for your work on school board elections, MSBA fully supports SF 4951 and believes that education funding should be used to educate students, not for elections.

Sincerely,
Andrea Cuene
MSBA Government Relations
acuene@mnmsba.org
763-458-1252