

March 11, 2024

Minnesota Senate  
1200 Minnesota Senate Building  
State and Local Government and Veterans Committee  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Chair Dziedzic and Members of the State and Local Government and Veterans Committee,

As a current employee of University of Minnesota (UMN) Extension and as an elected senator within the Civil Service Senate (CSS) of the University of Minnesota, I am writing to express my support for SF2597, which if passed would reform the MN Public Employment Labor Relations Act (PELRA).

The bargaining units currently designated by PELRA put myself in Civil Service (CS) together with thousands of other employees who do not share my responsibilities, work in my community or understand that my college even exists. While I work in Anoka County, my colleagues are scattered across the state in Extension's dozens of regional and county offices. Our roles do not look the same as those in the College of Medicine, nor do they look the same as those in the UMN-TC police department. And yet – many of us are classified with the same CS designation because it is a convenient catch-all bucket.

As a Civil Service Senator, I am witness to the shortcomings of co-governance, and how it offers a false promise of fair employee-employer relations. Our senators are nervous, if not informally barred, from moving legislation before our Board of Regents if it has not been pre-approved by the Office of Human Resources, regardless of how reasonable it might be. When I am contacted by a colleague regarding how they are being treated at work, I am unable to support them like a steward or encourage them to use their Weingarten rights because those rights are not extended to us and our bargaining unit. However, and this is not uncommon – many in my department were *formerly* union. They had these rights before they were administratively stripped away.

The Extension service and its staff statewide are vital to meeting the University of Minnesota's mission of outreach – we bring world-class education and research to all of Minnesota's communities. We are investing in relationships with our indigenous tribal governments to uplift their own stories and we are constantly innovating on what it means to be educators. We develop pioneering resources for our SNAP-Ed programming on everything from how rural childcare providers prepare healthy meals for children to making person-centered food shelves. We help farmers and rural families cope with ambiguous loss, and stand hand-in-hand with our public health peers in confronting the opioid epidemic. Our 4-H programs make Minnesota safer, healthier, and more vibrant. Extension brings the University of Minnesota to all corners and communities within our state, and the ability to come together will only build upon the great work we do for Minnesotans everywhere.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cole Hanson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Cole Hanson  
SHIP Health Educator, University of Minnesota Extension