

March 5, 2024

Chair Fateh and Members of the Higher Education Committee,

As a current employee of University of Minnesota (UMN) Extension, I am writing to express my support for SF2597, which if passed would reform the MN Public Employment Labor Relations Act (PELRA).

The College of Extension is not well-understood or recognized, though its impactful work changing the lives of Minnesotans is felt throughout the state. Our mission in Extension is to bring the best of the University's research to communities through actionable recommendations, quality educational programs, strategic engagement, and partner or volunteer mobilization. We are creating innovative approaches to addressing complex issues like climate change, food security, mental health, substance use, and youth development.

My role as an Extension Educator requires me to wear many hats: program manager, evaluator, teacher, community engager, recruiter, researcher, author and advocate, to name a few. The breadth and depth of my Extension colleagues' expertise is such that their efforts are recognized and implemented well beyond the borders of Minnesota. Despite these contributions, Extension employees and other academic staff at UMN are significantly underpaid when compared to similar institutions.

Within Extension, the department I'm housed in has a history with union representation, with many staff currently lumped into non-representative labor groups while others have no option for union representation at all. Extension is no stranger to addressing complex issues and we're also tasked with supporting evidence-based interventions to address them. According to research conducted by the Treasury Department, legislation that supports unions not only helps employees but helps communities too.

Extension's work is all about supporting communities and giving us an opportunity for fair representation would impact more than just those of us conducting the work, but those we're working for too.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Susie West
Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Extension