



Healthy Democracy Healthy People Minnesota

March 25, 2024

Chair Ron Latz
3105 Minnesota Senate Bldg
St Paul, MN 55155

Hello Chair Latz and members of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee,

Healthy Democracy Healthy People- Minnesota (HDHP-MN) is a nonpartisan coalition of health sector organizations united by our understanding that a healthy inclusive democracy serves as a foundation for the health and wellbeing of our communities. Studies reveal that communities with high voter participation enjoy greater social cohesion and better health.¹ Recent research has also shown a strong relationship between health outcomes and those policies that strengthen and protect democracy, including provisions in the Minnesota Voting Rights Act.^{2,3,&4}

The federal VRA has also been shown to be associated with decreases in Black infant deaths,⁵ which is of particular note here in Minnesota as we continue to see racial disparities in birth outcomes. These findings further illustrate the importance of protecting the right to vote for health and racial equity. For these reasons, *HDHP- MN* is writing in support of the Minnesota Voting Rights Act, SF3994 because it would restore and clarify protections against discrimination for voters of color in Minnesota in the face of a recent federal 8th Circuit Court decision that weakened those protections in our state. Congress passed the federal Voting Rights Act in 1965 (VRA) to prevent state and local governments from passing laws or policies that discriminate against voters on the basis of race or language minority status. The federal VRA undid many Jim Crow-era discriminatory policies and worked to ensure the right and freedom to vote of every citizen by working to eliminate racial discrimination in voting. This bill builds upon the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA), one of the most successful civil rights measures and a landmark legislation protecting and expanding voting rights.

As health professionals we are committed champions for the conditions that are vital to advancing health and racial equity. Persistent racial inequities in voter participation in Minnesota make the protections of the MNVRA even more urgent. In November 2020, 84 percent of eligible white

¹ Nelson C, Sloan J, & Chandra A. (2019). [Examining Civic Engagement Links to Health](#). RAND Social and Economic Well-Being. (California: RAND Corporation: Santa Monica California).

² Tamara Rushovich, Rachel C. Nethery, Ariel White, and Nancy Krieger, 2024: [1965 US Voting Rights Act Impact on Black and Black Versus White Infant Death Rates in Jim Crow States, 1959–1980 and 2017–2021](#) American Journal of Public Health 114, 300_308, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2023.307518>

³ Schraufnagel, S. (2023). Voting Restrictions and Public Health: An Analysis of State Variation 1996–2020. State and Local Government Review, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160323X231202421>

⁴ Pabayo R, Liu SY, Grinshteyn E, Cook DM, Muennig P. Barriers to Voting and Access to Health Insurance Among US Adults: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Lancet Reg Health Am.* 2021;2:100026. Published 2021 Jul 30. doi:10.1016/j.lana.2021.100026

⁵ Tamara Rushovich, Rachel C. Nethery, Ariel White, and Nancy Krieger, 2024: [1965 US Voting Rights Act Impact on Black and Black Versus White Infant Death Rates in Jim Crow States, 1959–1980 and 2017–2021](#) American Journal of Public Health 114, 300_308, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2023.307518>



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Minnesotans were registered to vote - compared to 79 percent of Asian voters, 75 percent of Hispanic voters, and 71 percent of Black voters (source: [U.S. Census Bureau](https://www.census.gov)). An inclusive representative democracy is a key path towards a healthy thriving state.⁶

HDHP-MN stands firm in our assertion that our health is almost completely connected to our ability to influence the policy decisions that create the conditions necessary for health. For a democracy to be truly inclusive and representative, we must pass legislation that protects the right to vote for all Minnesotans. We strongly support SF3994 and urge members of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee to vote in favor of this critical legislation.

Best,

Jeanne Ayers

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⁶ Blakely TA, Kennedy BP, Kawachi I. Socioeconomic inequality in voting participation and self-rated health. *Am J Public Health*. 2001;91(1):99-104. doi:10.2105/ajph.91.1.99