



March 25, 2024

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

Dear Chair Latz and Members of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee:

We Choose Us (WCU) is a coalition of over 40 grassroots organizations, unions and advocacy groups committed to building multiracial democracy in Minnesota. We write to express our strong support for the Minnesota Voting Rights Act ("MNVRA"/SF 3994). This legislation would restore and clarify protections against discrimination for voters of color in Minnesota in the face of a recent court decision that weakened those protections in our state.

Congress passed the federal Voting Rights Act in 1965 to prevent state and local governments from passing laws or policies that discriminate against voters on the basis of race or language minority status. Section two of the Voting Rights Act allows private citizens to sue in court to challenge discriminatory voting plans or policies. Unfortunately, a series of court decisions has weakened the federal Voting Rights Act in recent decades. In the most recent of those damaging court decisions, the federal Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals - whose jurisdiction includes Minnesota and several neighboring states - ruled in November 2023 that voters and organizations that represent them can no longer sue under Section 2 of the federal VRA.

The MN Voting Rights Act would restore and clarify protections against discrimination for voters of color and those whose first language is not English. The MNVRA would restore the ability of private citizens or civil rights groups to challenge discriminatory voting policies or practices in court, the essential protection that was lost in the recent circuit court decision. The bill also protects against "vote dilution" (when jurisdictions use at-large elections or draw district boundaries in a way that "dilutes" the collective voice of voters of color, preventing them from having an equal opportunity to elect the candidates of their choice). The bill requires good-faith negotiations to give local jurisdictions the opportunity to fix voting discrimination efficiently. And, it instructs state judges to interpret election laws in a pro-voter way whenever reasonably possible.

Persistent racial inequities in voting in Minnesota make the protections of the MNVRA even more urgent. In November 2020, 84 percent of eligible white 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)). The racial disparities in who turns out to vote are even greater. Seventy-nine percent of eligible white voters turned out to vote in November 2020, compared to 66 percent of Black voters, 64 percent of Asian voters, and 63 percent of Hispanic voters. While many factors contribute to likelihood to register or to vote, it is essential that voters are protected from discriminatory voting practices or policies that exacerbate these inequities.

Minnesota lawmakers took major strides to protect and expand the right to vote in the 2023 session. The MNVRA is an opportunity to build on our state's democracy leadership and to stand firmly against voting discrimination. California, Washington, Oregon, Virginia, and New York, and Connecticut have all passed their own state voting rights acts. It is time for Minnesota - in the wake of the recent circuit court decision - to protect voters of color in our state and to provide all the necessary tools to tackle our state's persistent racial inequities in voting.

We urge your support for the MN Voting Rights Act (SF 3994).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Lilly Sasse, We Choose Us Campaign Director
and We Choose Us Coalition Partners:

100% Campaign

Asian American Organizing Project

African Career Education and Resources

AFL-CIO

AFSCME Council 5

Ayada Leads

Barbershop and Black Congregation Cooperative

ISAIAH

Jewish Community Action

Land Stewardship Project

League of Women Voters

Main Street Alliance

Minnesota Association of Professional Employees

Minnesota Association of Peacemakers

CAIR Minnesota
Citizens United
Clean Elections Minnesota
Clean Water Action
Conservation Minnesota
COPAL
ERA Minnesota
Fe y Justicia
Fair Vote
Grassroots in Action
Healthy Democracy Healthy People
Indivisible
Inquilinxs Unidxs por Justicia
Inter Faculty Organization
Interfaith Power and Light

Minnesota Nurses Association
Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance
Minnesota Voice
Minnesota Move to Amend State Network
Muslim Coalition
Native American Community Development Institute
New Justice Project
OutFront Minnesota
Planned Parenthood
Pro-Choice MN
SEIU
TakeAction Minnesota
Ujamaa Place
Unidos
We Win Institute