

02/24/2025

Elizabeth Hanke- Mankato

Dear Senate Education Policy Committee,

I am writing to express my concerns about S.F. 197, which proposes allowing students under 18 to serve on school boards with voting rights, including on matters like staff raises. While student involvement is vital, granting voting power to minors raises significant legal, ethical, and practical issues.

### **1. Legal and Constitutional Concerns**

Minnesota law requires voters to be at least 18. Allowing minors to vote on public contracts and financial matters could conflict with state election laws and raise legal challenges, questioning the validity of board decisions.

<https://mnmsba.org/membership/legal-requirements-for-school-board-members/>

### **2. Vote Dilution and Accountability**

Adding student members with voting rights dilutes the votes of elected representatives, undermining community representation. Elected members are chosen by their constituents to make decisions in the best interest of the entire district; a responsibility students are not legally or constitutionally empowered to share.

### **3. Conflict of Interest**

Students would be voting on the compensation and employment terms of staff members they interact with daily, which presents an inherent conflict of interest and ethical dilemma.

### **4. Alternative Approaches**

Student perspectives are crucial but can be effectively included through non-voting roles, advisory committees, or regular input sessions, ensuring their voices are heard without compromising legal integrity.

S.F. 197 sets a risky precedent that could undermine school governance's accountability and legal foundation. I'd like the committee to reconsider this proposal and explore alternatives that balance student input with responsible leadership.

Thank you for considering these concerns.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Hanke  
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