

Brenda Lewis, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Fridley Public Schools
SF 2244
Speaking in support of SF 2244

Good Morning, Chair Kunesh, and members of the committee. I am Brenda Lewis, Superintendent of Fridley Public Schools. I am here to express our strong support for Senate File 2244, which proposes an increase in the referendum levy equalizing factors.

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Fridley Public Schools serves a diverse student population, with well over 70% of families qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch programs. SF 2244 seeks to address disparities by increasing the referendum levy equalizing factors. This adjustment would enhance state aid to districts like ours, where property tax bases are insufficient to generate adequate local revenue. By raising the equalizing factors, the bill would reduce the reliance on local property taxes and promote more equitable funding across all districts.

Homeowners in Fridley pay \$44 annually on a \$350,000 home to generate \$100 per student in voter-approved operating referendum revenue. This is significantly higher than the estimated metro average of \$32, placing Fridley well above average in taxpayer burden. This additional funding would help us to maintain critical programs and services for our students. Specifically, it would allow us to continue offering academic interventions, mental health support, and cocurricular activities that are vital to student success.

Our community has demonstrated its commitment to our schools. In November 2024, Fridley Public Schools successfully passed an operating levy increase, ensuring stable funding for student programs and staff. Our voters also approved a \$30 million facility bond to address deferred maintenance needs. While we are grateful for this support, increasing the equalizing factors would lessen the need for future local tax increases, fostering a more sustainable funding model.

In conclusion, SF 2244 represents a crucial step toward equitable education funding in Minnesota. By adjusting the referendum levy equalizing factors, we can ensure that all students, regardless of their district's property wealth, have access to quality educational opportunities. I urge you to support this bill and invest in the future of our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.