

Brenda Lewis, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Fridley Public Schools
SF 2239
Speaking in support of SF 2239

Good morning, Chair Kunesh and members of the Education Finance Committee. My name is Brenda Lewis, Ph.D., and I am the Superintendent of Fridley Public Schools. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of Senate File 2239.

SF 2239 proposes an increase in the first-tier local optional revenue (LOR) allowance per pupil unit (PU) starting in fiscal year 2027. This adjustment is crucial for districts like ours, where the referendum market value per resident pupil unit is below the state average and substantially below the metro average—which limits our capacity to generate adequate local revenue.

For Fridley Public Schools, with an estimated 3,000 pupil units, this increase translates to an additional \$750,000 annually in LOR. Given our current general fund budget of approximately \$40 million, this represents a 1.875% boost in revenue—a necessary investment as we work to support our students in an increasingly challenging financial landscape. These figures represent a \$250 increase per pupil (which is simply keeping with inflation).

At this time, Fridley Public Schools is making \$3.6 million in budget reductions for the 2025-26 school year to stabilize our finances while maintaining core educational services. This figure does not include a potential reduction in compensatory revenue. If that reduction were to occur, we would face a total shortfall of \$4.8 million. These cuts impact staffing, academic programming, and student support services, making additional revenue from SF 2239 critical to our district's ability to serve students effectively.

Fridley Public Schools serves a diverse student population, with nearly 80% students of color and well over 70%—a rapidly rising number—coming from economically disadvantaged households. These demographics create unique complexities, as we work to meet a wide range of academic, social-emotional, and resource-based needs. Despite these challenges, we remain relentless in our commitment to serving every student, ensuring they have the opportunities and support necessary to succeed.

Moreover, SF 2239 enhances the equalizing factors for Local Optional Revenue. These adjustments will result in a more equitable distribution of state aid, reducing our district's reliance on local property taxes and alleviating the burden on our community.

While I wish I could stand before you today to talk about how this funding will allow us to enhance services and supports for our students, the reality is that it will simply help us cut a little less into the bone. These dollars will not eliminate the painful reductions we are making but will soften the blow and allow us to preserve some of the critical supports our students and staff depend on.

In summary, SF 2239 is a necessary step toward financial stability for Fridley Public Schools, allowing us to continue serving our students with excellence despite the complexities we face. Without this funding, our ability to provide high-quality education will be severely compromised. I urge the committee to support this bill and invest in the future of all Minnesota students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.