



February 11, 2025

Senate Transportation Committee
Minnesota State Senate
95 University Avenue W.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

To the Members of the Minnesota Senate Transportation Committee:

On behalf of Scenic America, the nation's only 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and protecting our country's scenic beauty, I am writing to express our strong support for Minnesota Senate Bill 485, which establishes a statewide moratorium on new billboards and declares existing billboards as nonconforming uses. In our over forty years of operation, we have been at the forefront of advocacy and education for many issues that directly affect the beauty and character of our communities.

We have built a reputation as an organization that can quickly and effectively organize and activate a motivated group of supporters for or against issues of importance. One of these key issues—an issue that we have taken all the way to the Supreme Court—is the matter of outdoor advertising. Billboards, both digital and static, are a blight on our communities and introduce threats to the safety of ourselves and our surroundings.

Minnesota's scenic beauty is one of its greatest assets, drawing visitors from around the world and contributing significantly to the state's economy. Unfortunately, billboards—both static and digital—diminish this beauty, creating visual pollution that distracts drivers and detracts from the state's natural and unique scenic character. By prohibiting new billboards, SF 485 ensures that Minnesota remains a destination known for its unspoiled landscapes and vibrant communities. By declaring existing billboards as nonconforming uses through a fair amortization process, the bill balances current business interests with the need to restore Minnesota's scenic beauty over time.

The negative impacts of billboards are well-documented:

- **Economic Burden:** States and local municipalities often incur costs, sometimes reaching millions of dollars, when regulating the placement and maintenance of billboards, including the enforcement of zoning laws and sign ordinances. While billboards may seem like an economic benefit, they primarily serve large national or multinational companies, offering little direct local economic value. This misalignment with local economic growth makes billboards an inefficient and often harmful economic tool for communities. Conversely, tourism has been shown to increase in cities and states that have banned billboards as community beautification increases commercial desirability.
- **Driver and Pedestrian Safety:** Numerous geospatial and neuroscience scientific studies have shown that billboards, especially digital billboards, create distractions for drivers

and lead to traffic accidents. For example, a 2020 review of 27 independent studies found that outdoor advertising signs are designed specifically to grab drivers' attention and divert it away from the roadway, contributing to distraction from both the road and pedestrians ahead. This was especially evident in inclement weather, difficult road patterns and intersections, at higher speeds, abrupt traffic changes, and when the signs were more visually dramatic. Roads and communities without these distractions are much safer and more secure for all residents and visitors.

- **Environmental Degradation:** Billboards require a large consumption of materials as well as the removal of trees and vegetation. Additionally, digital signs leave a large carbon footprint with their electronic requirements. Data shows an illuminated billboard consumes over 7,000 kilowatt-hours annually and a single LED billboard consumes nearly 163,000 kilowatt-hours annually. LED signs and billboards also contribute to high levels of light pollution with health impacts to humans such as circadian rhythm disruption as well as interference of nocturnal animal migration, movement, and foraging. Fewer billboards means less resource consumption, waste production, and energy required for maintenance, contributing to environmental sustainability.
- **Socioeconomic Implications:** Billboards are economic burdens for cities and communities that contribute to regulatory and maintenance costs, decreased property values, and the loss of tourism revenue. It is a common misconception that billboards are economically advantageous to cities, as off-premises advertising primarily benefits large companies, with minimal direct economic contributions to local businesses. Additionally, billboards that increase visual blight have been shown to reduce adjacent property values, especially in areas with historically marginalized people.
- **Aesthetics and Community Character:** One of the most apparent impacts that billboards have on communities is the immediate decline of visual appeal. Large and imposing billboards dominate the landscape and distract from the natural beauty of the surroundings. The elimination of billboards creates a cleaner visual environment, making it easier for residents and visitors to appreciate the region's architectural, cultural, and natural assets without the distraction of numerous advertising signs.

The proposed moratorium on new billboards is a balanced and thoughtful approach that prioritizes long-term community well-being. By declaring existing billboards as nonconforming uses, the bill respects the rights of current operators while gradually reducing visual blight. This measured strategy ensures that Minnesota's scenic character is protected for generations to come. We encourage you to support SF 485 and help Minnesota join the ranks of Hawaii, Alaska, Vermont, and Maine as the only states to do away with billboards for the benefit of tourism, safety, economic prosperity, and scenic beauty.

Sincerely,

Scenic America