



March 7, 2023

Hon. Mike Freiberg
Chair, House Committee on Elections Finance and Policy
200 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chairman Freiberg and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Fair Elections Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers to registration and voting through advocacy and impact litigation, and the Center's Campus Vote Project, a national organization to educate and engage young voters on voting rights issues and institutionalize civic engagement at university and college campuses, we write to express our support for the early voting opportunities reflected in HF 558; however, we request that you consider including additional polling locations—such as college campuses—and providing broader discretion to local election officials to select polling locations outside of county or city buildings that better accommodate their unique voting populations.

Early voting is an essential way to mitigate barriers to electoral participation that many face across the country, particularly historically marginalized communities, such as communities of color, the elderly, students, and people with disabilities. The logistical hurdles associated with casting a ballot—taking off from work, finding childcare, and securing reliable transportation, among others—often disproportionately prevent people in these communities from participating in our democracy. HF 558 would reduce barriers to voting by establishing a more robust process for early voting. This important expansion of early voting opportunities will make the ballot box more accessible and alleviate stress on the state's Election Day voting apparatus.

Although we support the implementation of many of the early voting provisions in HF 558, we believe that the bill as written could be amended to better ensure full access to in-person early voting for all, particularly for historically marginalized communities.

Page 1 of 3



fairelectionscenter.org



1825 K St. NW, Suite 701, Washington, DC, 20006

HF 558 currently provides that early voting must be made available “at polling places designated in the county auditor’s offices in county-owned or operated buildings, at the municipal clerk’s office...and at any other county or city-owned or operated buildings designated by the county auditor or municipal clerk.”¹ This language would likely exclude important polling locations like postsecondary institution campuses as well as restrict the ability of local election officials to choose non-county or city buildings that may be located in closer proximity to the voting population and/or may better accommodate the accessibility needs of voters with disabilities.

Students often face numerous barriers to voting, especially voting in person and off-campus. College-aged people are some of the least likely to own a car and many do not have a driver’s license at all.² This—in addition to their unfamiliarity with community locations outside of campus—can make it very difficult for them to reach off-campus early voting sites. Explicitly including postsecondary institutions in the location requirements for early voting would provide meaningful and practicable access to the early voting opportunities this bill seeks to establish. On-campus early voting sites would serve the whole campus from students, faculty, and staff as well as the surrounding community.

Voters with disabilities also face immense challenges in participating in our democracy. Too often, polling locations are not fully accessible to people with disabilities, which can result in their disenfranchisement. Notably, a study of the Current Population Survey Voting Supplement for November 2020 found that if people with disabilities voted at the same rate as people without disabilities with the same demographic characteristics, there would be roughly 1.75 million more voters.³

Accessibility of early voting locations, including access via public transportation, is vital to increasing participation among voters with disabilities and other historically marginalized voters to ensure that they have their voices heard in our elections. HF 558 should, therefore, also be amended to give greater ability for local officials to select polling places that best serve their voters, rather than limiting their options to county or city buildings. Colleges and universities also tend to have newer ADA-compliant facilities again making them ideal voting sites to serve the whole community where they are located.

HF 558 is an important measure to improve equity and expand access to the ballot box by creating a uniform, statewide early voting process. Ensuring better access to early voting among college students and providing more discretion to election officials to choose additional

¹ Minn. H.F. 558 Sec. 16, 93d Leg., Reg. Sess. (2023).

² See, e.g., Christopher Kruz et al., *The Young and the Carless? The Demographics of New Vehicle Purchases*, Fed. Reserve (Jun. 24, 2016), <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econresdata/notes/feds-notes/2016/the-young-and-the-carless-the-demographics-of-new-vehicle-purchases-20160624.html>.

³ Lisa Schur et al., *Fact Sheet: Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2020 elections*, RUTGERS UNIV., https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/Fact_sheet_on_disability_and_voter_turnout_in_2020_0.pdf (last visited Mar. 7, 2023).



locations—near their voters as well as accessible to people with disabilities—would better allow full access to early voting opportunities for all.

Sincerely,

Michelle Kanter Cohen

Policy Director and Senior Counsel
Fair Elections Center

mkantercohen@fairelectionscenter.org

Mike Burns

National Director
Campus Vote Project

mburns@campusvoteproject.org

