



February 27, 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 HF 495, as well as to suggest incorporating portions of the related Senate bill.

Students are often less likely to possess the documentation necessary to prove some voter eligibility requirements, such as residency. Increasingly fewer young people are getting drivers licenses<sup>1</sup> and many of them do not have utility bills in their names as multiple occupancy renters, especially those living in campus housing. Under existing state law, current students at in-state postsecondary institutions that enroll attendees accepting state or federal financial aid may use a student photo ID as proof of residency for election day voter registration if they live in campus housing or within a 10-mile radius of campus and their school verifies their residential information with local election officials.<sup>2</sup> Nothing, however, requires schools to provide this information. This can leave students unable to utilize student photo IDs—a common and reliable form of identification—to prove their residency.

HF 495 would importantly require postsecondary institutions enrolling attendees receiving state financial aid to provide the necessary residential information to election officials for use in the

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<sup>1</sup> Shannon Osaka, *'I'll call an Uber or 911': Why Gen Z doesn't want to drive*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Feb. 13, 2023), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2023/02/13/gen-z-driving-less-uber/>.

<sup>2</sup> Minn. Stat. § 135A.17, subdiv. 2 (2022).

election day voter registration of qualifying students.<sup>3</sup> This reduces administrative barriers to registration by better enabling the use of student IDs for residency verification backed by information provided by in-state postsecondary institutions.

Student IDs are a secure method of verifying student information and a convenient way to establish voter eligibility. These IDs are commonly issued to postsecondary students and frequently include robust security features. Further, student IDs are increasingly used for crucial functions like granting access to buildings and rooms as well as for financial transactions at on- and off-campus businesses. HF 495 is a commonsense measure to better utilize this secure form of ID to streamline the registration process for young voters.

Although we urge your support of HF 495, its Senate companion, SF 1515, includes additional provisions that we request you adopt in their entirety. Importantly, SF 1515 would require postsecondary institutions enrolling students accepting state and federal aid to provide voter registration information each fall and spring, create and maintain a webpage to share voter resources, establish a campus vote coordinator, and collaborate with student government to develop a plan to distribute voter information to students.<sup>4</sup> These additional provisions would increase engagement and participation among young voters in the electoral process, a demographic with traditionally low relative rates of voter participation.<sup>5</sup> These campus-based measures are uniquely effective, because academic institutions and student governments serve as trusted messengers of civic engagement education and information to their students. In addition, when educational institutions provide such information and access points, they provide consistency in making information regularly accessible regardless of the activity of particular student organizations or off-campus groups.

HF 495 and the additional provisions in SF 1515 are commonsense measures to reduce administrative and informational barriers that students encounter while registering to vote, and we urge you to enact them into law. If you would like further information, please feel free to contact Michelle Kanter Cohen, Policy Director and Senior Counsel at Fair Elections Center, at [mkantercohen@fairelectionscenter.org](mailto:mkantercohen@fairelectionscenter.org).

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<sup>3</sup> Minn. H.F. 495, 93d Leg., Reg. Sess. (2023).

<sup>4</sup> Minn. S.F. 1515, 93d Leg., Reg. Sess. (2023).

<sup>5</sup> See Understanding a Diverse Generation, Figure 9: Voter Turnout by Age, 1974-2010, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (Nov. 2011), available at [http://archive.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/CIRCLE\\_cluster\\_report2010.pdf](http://archive.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/CIRCLE_cluster_report2010.pdf).