

Committee Chair Youakim, and members of the of the Education Policy Committee,

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I represent Reopen Minnesota Schools, a growing non-partisan, grassroots organization working to make sure our schools are opened in the fall. I had prepared a statement regarding the opening of Minnesota Schools in the fall, and how it relates to HF 36, and General Education Modified Provisions. However today, a letter was forwarded to me by a school board member from a district in Minnesota. I came to the immediate conclusion that this letter, in great part, must be shared with the committee, which has a great deal of legislative oversight for education in Minnesota. Quite plainly, this letter makes me scared for the school children of Minnesota, due to the lack of foresight and understanding that is getting forced upon our school districts. I quote the board member:

“The Minnesota Department of Education revealed school districts could expect word on plans for the 2020-21 school year on July 27. Less than six more weeks from now. By that time, many rural districts will be less than a month from the start of their school year. All options are still on the table, from full resumption of classes to continued full distance learning. Local district leaders have been totally frozen out of this decision-making process by the Governor and his agency leadership appointees.

This delay and lack of clarity is outrageous and unacceptable. District staffs across the state have been scrambling to adjust and plan for many possible futures for months now, and certainly much of this is unavoidable. But now districts will have to continue to plan for next school year under a wide variety of possible scenarios, in effect, having to triple or quadruple work with no guidance to the final outcome. By the time the decision comes, this means we, as districts, will have to be doing all kinds of things totally in the dark, things such as:

- Preparing instructional plans and modifications in the event of anything short of full resumption of classroom activities, as mandated by the legislature
 - Passing and adopting a budget
 - Setting staff levels including teacher retention, teacher hiring, course availability, building balancing, and other items.
 - Communicating all this to families so parents know what to expect, kids can meet their teachers, learners can get comfortable, etc. Districts across the state now have essentially no answer for these parents for at least six weeks.
- And much much more.

But even for our district, this lack of information from the Governor and his agency leadership is completely unconscionable. There is no doubt this will have a negative effect on students all across the state. Many districts will be totally incapable of successfully adapting to directives under this timeline. We have many hundreds of districts across the state, each with their own school boards, local communities, Superintendents, district leaders, and teachers, all of whom are capable of working as teams to get their districts going safely. To think the work of these many thousands of people, working in diverse districts all across the state, can be replaced by a tiny handful of Governor’s staff and agency bureaucrats is arrogance of the highest order. These tiny groups of decision-makers are not competent to replace school leadership all across the state. I will say it again: they are not up to the job, period.”

Members of the committee, you can understand my concern when one member of a school board writes this letter to a group of concerned parents about the reopening of schools in Minnesota. HF 36 states schools must provide supportive school programming. This will not happen if changes are not made, and it will not be the school districts’ faults. Your job is to ensure the continued excellence of Minnesota schools. We need Minnesota schools open, in the fall, normally, and without restrictions, and we need legislative assistance to make sure this is done. We have no time to waste. Our children are depending on us.