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To: Chair, Representative Michael Nelson

For: Testimony for Hearing – State Government Finance and Elections on
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Support for *HF2618 “Cities required to allow native landscapes on private land”*

As a long-time resident of Minnesota, I strongly support *HF2618* to allow native landscapes on private lands. As an individual citizen who values all the creatures of the natural world, I have worked for many years to encourage and support others to move away from the lawn paradigm and to create garden landscapes that sustain birds, pollinators, and other creatures that in turn sustain human beings by assisting food plants through pollination as well as providing beauty to surround us. Interest in natural landscaping using native plants is growing across America as people become aware of what is being called an “insect apocalypse” caused by urban sprawl; widespread monocultures of corn and other farm products; as well as the use of pesticides both in agriculture and ornamental landscaping.

I am sure that this committee has received other testimony from organizations and individuals describing the multitude of reasons why native landscaping is far superior to the ubiquitous turf lawn found throughout Minnesota and the United States. I do not think I need to repeat these arguments. I can only say that I am in full agreement with all the points being presented as to the reasons native landscaping is superior to turf lawns for supporting our natural world.

I was thrilled to learn about Governor Walz' Executive Order 19-28: *Restoring Healthy, Diverse Pollinator Populations that Sustain and Enhance Minnesota's Environment, Economy, and Way of Life*. I have also been excited about the possibilities offered by the *Lawns to Legumes Program* that assists Minnesotans to convert turf grass lawns to bee lawns. However, I have also been extremely frustrated by what I have experienced at the local level of government.

On the one hand, I have seen both Governor Dayton and Governor Walz promote pollinator habitat through Executive Orders; read articles from other states lauding the *Lawns to Legumes Program*; attended many workshops/seminars on native plant landscaping practices; listened to lectures on methods for supporting our declining pollinators; and observed a "native landscaping" movement taking root across America

On the other hand, I have been extremely frustrated by local "weed ordinances" that fly in the face of attempts at the state and national level to support native landscaping in order to increase pollinator habitat. Some local authorities have attempted to thwart the growing interest of private property owners to landscape their land with native plants by using outdated weed laws, not to protect public health or agriculture, but rather to enforce conformity, status quo, and their own personal aesthetic preferences.

This exact situation is exemplified in a recent lawsuit that was decided in the Minnesota Court of Appeals. In summary, an elderly resident of North Mankato was forced to defend himself in court because one neighbor and the city council did not like the "looks" of his yard and declared his property to be a "nuisance." The court found in the resident's favor, yet despite the court's findings that there was no evidence that the property harms public health in any way, the city administrator has insisted that the property violates city code, and that the city will continue to pursue enforcement of the code.

https://www.mankatofreepress.com/news/local_news/no-9-north-mankato-man-wins-legal-bid-for-natural-yard-but-city-keeps-pushing/article_efda4610-6397-11ec-b24c-535a0e7c38b5.html

<https://mn.gov/law-library-stat/archive/ctapun/2021/OPa210143-100421.pdf>

In my opinion, this case exemplified the use of power for the purpose of imposing aesthetic values on a resident as well as an infringement on his private property rights. I believe that passage of ***HF2618 “Cities required to allow native landscapes on private land”*** would prevent this sort of situation from occurring. Residents who simply want to landscape their property in a manner that fulfills their interest in expanding native habitat should not have to fear that local officials will seek to charge them with violations of local “weed” laws. It should be the right of every property owner to be able to landscape their property in a manner that befits their value system and aesthetic of beauty. Passing *HF 2618* would guarantee all Minnesota residents the right to landscape our yards with native flowers, native shrubs, native trees, and other native plants, rather than turf grass, without fear of violating local environmentally destructive “weed” ordinances.