

Minnesota Association of Townships



Executive Director:
Jeff Krueger

General Counsel:
Steve Fenske

Staff Attorney:
Karl-Christian Johannessen

April 20, 2021

The Honorable Mary Kiffmeyer
Chair, State Government Finance & Policy & Elections Committee
Minnesota Senate
95 University Avenue W.
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3103
St. Paul, MN 55155

VIA EMAIL

Dear Chair Kiffmeyer:

We would like to thank you, the committee and Senate staff who worked on the Omnibus State Government Finance & Policy & Elections Committee Bill as it contains many issues of interest related to township governance. As with most omnibus bills, there are provisions that are helpful to townships and others that are not.

We thank the committee for expanding access to all-mail balloting for townships in the Twin Cities area that choose to adopt it. (Art. 4, Sec. 46). Right now, towns outside the Twin Cities area may adopt mail balloting or in-person balloting, at their option, but metropolitan-area townships cannot. While MAT encourages towns to keep an in-person polling location, we recognize townships should make the decision for their community. Townships outside the metro-area have had this option since 1987, and some towns have run mail balloting elections for decades. MAT also thanks the Committee for allowing the full use of Federal Help America Vote Act funds as election administration costs can be burdensome and are one reason some towns choose mail balloting.

There are, however, several items of concern in the bill. First, the overall changes made to the election administration system are concerning because towns have good experience administering the current system without widespread problems. The current system appears reliable and towns are able to administer it. Additionally, MAT has the following concerns with the bill:

1. **Complicated New Balloting System:** The proposed balloting system appears to create at least three types of ballots. The proposal adds unnecessary complications into election administration. *See* Art. 4, Sec. 32 – Administrative Challenged Ballot; Art. 4, Sec. 34 – Provisional Ballot.

2. Partisan Election Judges for Provisional Balloting: Art. 4, Sec. 27, of the bill requires Provisional Ballots be opened and counted by election judges from each party, but townships do not always use partisan election judges. Per Minn. Stat. § 205.075, judges selected for township elections in March do not have party affiliation. Our clerks believe it will become very difficult to get election judges if the party affiliation of the judges must be reported. **MAT asks Section 34 be amended to exempt township elections held in March from the partisan election judge requirement.**
3. Newly Registered Voters Notice of Challenge: Art. 4, Sec. 9 requires the municipal clerk to provide a notice to newly registered voters whose registration is challenged, within 7 days of the registrant's status changing in the Statewide voter registration system. Townships do not have full-time staff and are usually operated by elected officials offering their time and talent in a near-volunteer capacity. It is unlikely they will be able to provide the notice within the time provided because they do not have an office staffed to perform these kinds of functions within the times provided.
4. Ballot Counting Time Limits: Art. 4, Sec. 7 places a three-day limit upon election judges to count votes cast by same-day registration. We are concerned about time limits placed on election officials that may deprive voters of having their vote counted or encourage faster work that may be less reliable.

MAT is concerned that changes to the election administration system will overburden township clerks, reduce the number of election judges willing to serve, and increase the costs of providing an in-person election within the townships. Historically, additional compliance measures and costs lead towns to adopt all-mail balloting. As MAT wants to see more in-person balloting we ask that any changes made to our elections system promote simplicity and efficiency of administration.

Thank you again for your time and dedication to public service. We appreciate your consideration of the issues brought forward by MAT in this letter and would be happy to be a resource to you during the conference committee stage of the legislative process.

Sincerely,



Steve M. Fenske

Cc: Gov. Tim Walz
Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan
Secretary of State Steve Simon
Rep. Michael Nelson
Senate State Government Finance & Policy & Elections Committee Members