

February 24, 2023

Common Cause MN is a nonpartisan grassroots organization dedicated to upholding the core values of American democracy. We work to create open, honest, and accountable government that serves the public interest; promote equal rights, opportunity, and representation for all. The Alliance for Emerging Power is Common Cause's youth program. It includes our Internship Program, Student Action Alliance Democracy Fellowship, Ambassador Program, and Election Protection Fellowship.

We have over 18,000 multipartisan statewide members. Despite belonging to various party affiliations, or not being affiliated, they've agreed to support our work ensuring Minnesota's democracy is safeguarded, elections continue to reflect the will of Minnesotans and everyone's vote counts.

We work to build the next generation of democracy leaders through advancing their advocacy and leadership skills. We expand their network and move them up the ladder of civic engagement to either boost their career or volunteer trajectory.

During the 2020 and 2022 election cycles young Americans and young Minnesotans showed us with their record-shattering turnout that they are a formidable voting bloc. However, as exciting as that is, more and more of our students in public schools – particularly students of color and other disenfranchised students – have little understanding of how government works. We must provide students with meaningful opportunities to learn about government and what roles they can have within it - providing passive options is not sufficient. [HF358 provides all MN students opportunity for a solid civics foundation regardless of socio-economic background.](#)

Civics is not given the strict attention it should get as a stand-alone class. Students are not able to see themselves in elected positions if they don't understand how, it works or more importantly, who qualifies and how. MN only requires a civics course.

- Nine states and the District of Columbia require one year of U.S. government or civics, while 30 states require a half year - 11 have no civics requirement. **MN only requires 1 course.**
- State civics curricula are heavy on knowledge but light on building skills and agency for civic engagement. **We would argue MN does not.**
- Nearly half the states allow credit for community service, only one requires it. **MN does not.**
- States with the highest rates of youth civic engagement tend to prioritize civics courses and AP U.S. government in their curricula. **We would argue MN does not.**

We support HF358 because it creates a space that allows for:

- Focused opportunity and greater understanding of how government works.
- An understanding of how to navigate the policymaking arena, and similar spaces of power.
- A level playing field among wealthier school districts and poorer districts when it comes to providing quality focused opportunities to learn about building civic life for all students regardless of their socio-economic background, race/ethnicity or zip code.

Thank you for your dedication to all Minnesotans as you work in committee.

Annastacia Belladonna-Carrera
Annastacia Belladonna-Carrera,
Executive Director