

February 27, 2023

Dear Rep. Mohamud Noor, Chair, Rep. Kristin Bahner, Vice Chair, and Members of the Minnesota House Human Services Finance Committee,

My name is Merry Grande and I live in District 52B in Mendota Heights, MN 55118. As a public health professional in a leadership position and engaged community member, I appreciate that a healthy inclusive democracy is necessary for the wellbeing and health of our communities. The best way to protect our democracy is to expand it. This session we have a real opportunity to improve the health of our state by ensuring our democracy is inclusive of all Minnesotans. I urge you to support the Democracy for the People Act (HF3/SF3) this legislative session.

Voting matters for health. Research from the Health & Democracy Index found that communities with high voter participation enjoy greater social cohesion and better health. States that make elections more accessible through policies like automatic and same day registration, non-strict voter ID requirements, felon re-enfranchisement and mail voting options enjoy higher levels of voter participation and better public health outcomes. While Minnesota is currently ranked as the 15th easiest state to cast a ballot, there is clearly room for improvement through adoption of policies like The Democracy for the People Act (HF3/SF3) to protect and expand access to democracy and ensure the voices of all Minnesotans matter. The best way to protect democracy is by expanding it.

Voter participation has been personally important in my family for many years. As the daughter of an Indian immigrant to Minnesota in the 1960s, the importance of voting as right of being a citizen was instilled at a young age. As an adult, I have helped my husband's grandmother (now, 99 years old! *photo, right*) have access to safe and healthy voting. She was born in 1923, just three years after the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote and takes this privilege of casting a vote very seriously. For an elderly person who no longer drives, mail and early voting are critical options. Now with teenage children of my own who will be eligible to vote in the near future, automatic and same day registration are welcomed to increase access for their ability to vote. The steps already taken to support felon re-enfranchisement are a wonderful movement to additional success for our communities.



Community health and wellbeing would be considerably improved by the passage of The Democracy for the People Act (HF3/SF3) and I strongly urge the Members of the Minnesota House Human Services Finance Committee to pass this bill including the expansion of automatic voter registration because it will address historical voter registration disparities and advance health equity.

That is why I support the Democracy for the People Act, as it begins to make the promise of democracy real for us all. Thank you for your committees' work, and the chance to impact the health of Minnesotans in a positive way for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Merry Grande
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