

**Written Testimony HF9**  
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Mr. Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Kenneth Wright. I was born and raised in Minneapolis. Through the Barbershop and Black Congregation Cooperative, I started to learn more about the political process and the work being done in my community.

I was able to discover the power I had all along -- the power of my voice through voting and organizing other people to do the same. I couldn't help but have this feeling I should have been out there voicing my opinion and doing what needed to be done for my community the whole time. But a lot of young Black men lack the knowledge -- it's not taught to us that it's important to vote or that we have the power to do so. But it soon became clear to me: once we come together, our vote matters.

However, that wasn't always clear to the other people we were organizing. One of the problems we ran into a lot was people feeling like their vote didn't matter. One gentleman I talked to was angry and hostile. He didn't believe his vote mattered or that he had any power in his community. I empathized with him, because when I was in his shoes I didn't understand any of that either. I told him his vote matters and that we are the ones that can make something happen in our communities.

I believe people need to hear that more. We need to restore faith in our democracy and our power in voting. If we get people to tune in to what's possible with that power, we can make bigger and better changes. To do that, we need to have a democracy that works for everyone. We have work to do in Minnesota, and we need a voting system that prioritizes equity and access for *all*.

I voted for the first time this year. After a press conference with our Governor, I walked across the street to cast my ballot. It felt incredible. I'm going to keep learning and working every single day to make sure everyone has that experience. We need to look directly at the issues facing our communities -- small and large to be able to finally come together. I hope the elected officials I, and so many other first-time voters, cast their ballots for will do the same.

Thank you.