



Statement on H.F. # 951: The Restore the Right to Vote Bill

Saint Paul MN – On 3/22/2018 H.F. No. 951, a critical bill to restore the civil right of voting to people on felony probation, was heard by the Minnesota House Committee on Public Safety and Security Policy and Finance. The bill was ultimately tabled for this session, but can be reintroduced as an amendment attached to other bills that make it further along in the legislative process.

The Council for Minnesotans of African American Heritage supports the bill. Voting is a fundamental part of being an American, and a critical condition to re-integrating people with criminal records as contributing members of our society with a stake in our community. Contrary to this principle, about 63,000 Minnesotans are unable to vote due to a felony conviction. About 51,000 live in the community on felony probation or supervised release and cannot vote. An estimated 64% live outside of the Twin Cities area, making this a statewide issue. About 70% of those disenfranchised are white, 24% African American and 6% Hispanic and Native American, making this an issue that is cross cultural and urgent.

The Council would like to thank Representative Dehn, for introducing the bill. And thank you to the bi-partisan MN Representatives; [Hertaus](#), [Zerwas](#), [McDonald](#), [Moran](#), [Omar](#), [Maye Quade](#), [Mariani](#), [Cornish](#), [Lee](#), [Allen](#), [Flanagan](#), [Freiberg](#), [Hamilton](#), [Kiel](#), [Rosenthal](#), [Carlson](#), [A.](#), [Pinto](#), [Bernardy](#), [Bly](#), [Hansen](#), [Murphy](#), [E.](#), [Howe](#), [Garofalo](#), [Baker](#), [Schultz](#), [Metsa](#), [Youakim](#), [Mahoney](#), [Fischer](#), [Davnies](#), [Becker-Finn](#), [Ward](#), [Olson](#) who co-sponsored the bill. We would also like to thank the Committee on Public Safety and Security Policy and Finance for hearing the bill. What occurred at the hearing was a lesson in democracy. Although the bill was tabled, the discussion of the bill was courteous, based in fact and centered upon discussing a real solution to extending voting rights to people who are currently being disenfranchised. Encouragingly, all of the discussion was centered on the American tradition of extending the right to vote to as many people as possible. Thank you to the committee members for their real consideration of the bill.

This is an issue that will need to be addressed. With 51,000 living in the community as our neighbors, raising families, and working to reintegrate, we need to give our neighbors and citizens every incentive to become true stakeholders in our community. The Council for Minnesotans of African American Heritage is calling for this discussion to continue during the session and for ultimate passage of the Restore the Right to Vote Bill.

The Minnesota Legislature empowered the Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage to ensure that people of African heritage fully and effectively participate in and equitably benefit from the political, social, and economic

resources, policies and procedures of the State of Minnesota. Generally, the Council is charged with the responsibility of:

- Advising the Governor and the Legislature on issues confronting People of African Heritage;
- Advising the Governor and the Legislature on statutes, rules and revisions to programs to ensure that Black people have access to benefits and services provided to people in Minnesota;
- Serving as a liaison to the federal government, local government units and private organizations on matters relating to People of African Heritage in Minnesota;
- Implementing programs designed to solve problems of People of African Heritage when authorized by statute, rule or order; and
- Publicizing the accomplishments of People of African Heritage and their contributions to the state.