2024 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REPORT

REPRESENTATIVE ESTHER AGBAJE – SENATOR BOBBY JOE CHAMPION – REPRESENTATIVE FUE LEE

Dear Neighbors,

The 93rd Minnesota Legislature concluded its most consequential two-year session in state history on Monday, May 20, 2024. After many years of divided government and Republican gridlock that prevented meaningful progress for our state, DFLers got the job done through a host of accomplishments that will benefit Minnesotans for generations to come.

Minnesota has long been considered the "education state," but decades of chronic underfunding have held our children back from their true potential. Democrats strengthened learning opportunities with historic investments in public schools, free school meals, funding targeted to improve literacy through the READ Act, and resources for school counselors, social workers, and psychologists. We also created more pathways to college and career training, including the North Star Promise guaranteeing free tuition for students from families earning less than $80,000 annually.

The DFL majorities made major progress on creating equity in our economy, our democracy and our child protection system. Legislation passed this year will make our communities and neighborhoods safer and healthier, and empower renters to organize and protect themselves against exploitation.

We couldn't do this work without you, and with this year's session complete, we're excited to share our accomplishments and start the conversation about the work that still needs to be done. Please reach out to us if you have any questions, we always appreciate hearing from you!

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MINNESOTA AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY PRESERVATION AND CHILD WELFARE DISPROPORTIONALITY ACT

Under Rep. Esther Agbaje and Senator Bobby Joe Champion's leadership, Minnesota took a major step in the movement to combat child welfare disparities in our state. After decades of advocacy, Governor Tim Walz signed the African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act into law. This landmark legislation acknowledges the complex challenges we face in our child welfare programs and underscores the need for continued work and commitment to address the root causes of these disparities. All Minnesotan families deserve the right and dignity to care for their children and keep them with kin to prevent further trauma and separation. By enacting safeguards and prioritizing reunification efforts, we invest not only in the safety of our most vulnerable but also in the future strength and resilience of our communities.

TENANTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Rep. Esther Agbaje was one of the first Black women of African heritage to lead the Tenants' Bill of Rights Committee Conference. The 2024 Tenants' Rights Policy Bill includes provisions to safeguard tenants' right to organize, protect survivors of domestic violence, clarify tenants' rights to emergency services and limit use of eviction filings, and more. One significant piece of the legislation is that it improves the ability of tenant associations to organize. Owners must allow tenants to post information in common areas of the building, distribute leaflets and brochures to individual units, contact tenants for purposes of organizing, survey tenants on their interest in forming a tenant association, and convene tenant association meetings in common areas. Landlords can't prohibit tenants from doing these activities, nor can they retaliate. Every Minnesotan deserves a safe, dignified place to call home, and this legislation is a major step forward in empowering tenants to hold bad actors accountable and enhancing best housing practices. Tenants should not fear eviction for asking for basic repairs. The legislation will provide strong safeguards to empower tenants and ensure they have a voice and the stability to thrive.

A CLEANER, GREENER NORTHSIDE

For far too long, our community has grappled with the impacts of pollution, with little being done to reverse the effects and hold polluters accountable. Measures championed by Rep. Lee and supported by the entire District 59 team are bringing environmental justice to North Minneapolis and the entire state. Rep. Lee was the lead author of new laws that are planting more trees, requiring consistent air testing, bringing zero-emission transit buses to the metro, and ensuring polluters pay a financial price for poisoning communities.

Whether it's the air we breathe or the water we drink, all Minnesotans – including future generations – deserve a life free of pollution. Efforts to reach that goal shouldn't place the financial burden on impacted communities, but on the companies that profit from pollution. New laws authored by Rep. Lee would increase penalties for repeat polluters, and require the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to craft strategies to hold the manufacturers of PFAS – a forever chemical – accountable for cleaning our water.

BREAKING GROUND ON LOCAL PROJECTS

Years of advocating for investment in our community are paying off as legislation turns into physical brick and mortar construction throughout our district. Whether it's breaking ground on the Upper Harbor Redevelopment or the opening of the V3 Sports Center, as Chair of the House Capital Investment Committee, Rep. Lee was instrumental in delivering millions of dollars in funding to local projects. With the support of Sen. Champion and Rep. Agbaje, together all three legislators ensured District 59 received the funding our community needs to grow and provide the resources our neighbors deserve.

In addition to those local projects, millions more have gone towards the local resources provided by The Link, the Northside Economic Opportunity Network, Parents in Community Action, the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, Satori Village Housing Development and more. We will continue to use our voices to ensure that our community is not forgotten when it comes to state investment.

JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The 2024 Jobs and Economic Development bill authored by Senator Champion renewed our investment in skills training and entrepreneurship, with a focus on creating a more equitable job market and spurring underserved communities. Highlights from the supplemental budget:

$4 million in new funding for the **PROMISE Act** to support businesses in Minneapolis and beyond.
$2 million to support the **2026 Special Olympics,** which will bring more than 100,000 visitors to the Twin Cities and raise our national profile as a destination
$1 million for **Change Starts With Community,** a public-private community service partnership that interrupts cycles of youth violence
$1 million for training and technical assistance to Black-owned small businesses through the **Black Chamber of Commerce**
$1 million for child care provider programs through **WomenVenture**
$1 million each for the **New American Development Center** and **African Immigrants Community Services** to launch and sustain small businesses and employment initiatives
$100,000 for the **North Minneapolis Pet Resource Center** to provide career training for veterinary services

MINNESOTA VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Minnesotans take great pride in their civic participation and exercising our democratic rights. The promise of American democracy can only be realized when everyone, regardless of race, cultural background or where they live, has equal access to participate in our elections. Last year, a deeply disturbing decision in federal court undermined a key provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Under that decision, BIPOC citizens could no longer take action to defend against discrimination and race-based voter suppression.

A coalition of lawmakers, advocates and experts including Secretary of State Steve Simon sprung into action to restore this right on the state level. Senator Champion was proud to author the Minnesota Voting Rights Act, which provides a legal remedy for Minnesotans facing discriminatory obstacles to keep them out of the voting booth.

This landmark legislation builds on our work in 2023, when the Democracy for the People Act enacted automatic voter registration and early voting, and Restore the Vote, which re-enfranchised 55,000 Minnesotans. The effort to make it harder to vote is organized, active, and well-funded. Our effort to protect these foundational rights must be just as fierce.

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