

Testimony of Karen Schaffer, Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues of Women Voters (CMAL), to Metropolitan Governance Task Force of the Minnesota Legislature, January 10, 2024

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman. My name is Karen Schaffer. I am the Chair of the Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues of Women Voters, (CMAL), an inter-league organization comprised of the individual members of the 19 local league chapters in the seven-county metro area. CMAL was established in 1962 for the exclusive purpose of increasing the knowledge and effectiveness of our members with respect to regional government issues.

For those unfamiliar with the League of Women Voters, it is a nonpartisan, volunteer membership organization comprised of men and women, ages 16 and above. We do not support or oppose candidates or political parties, but we may study and act on selected issues, such as metropolitan governance.

CMAL's January 2019 metropolitan governance study is unique in that we had 37 League members interview 52 local elected officials and city or county staff to learn about their experience with the Metropolitan Council and its staff and their opinions about Metropolitan Council governance. We hosted educational forums with panelists sharing a variety of viewpoints on metropolitan governance. We did this to develop our Report which examines the pro and cons of various positions. Once our final Report was published, local leagues met to discuss the Report and vote on the various positions. The voting results from all of the individual members in the 19 league chapters showed a minimum of 82% (and up to 94%) agreement on the following positions:

- The Governor should appoint members and Chair of the Metropolitan Council;
- Members of the Metropolitan Council should be appointed to fixed, staggered terms, and removable only for cause;
- Metropolitan Council members should be required to have a regional perspective, knowledge of regional issues, demographic diversity, and the ability to meet the time requirements for serving in the office;
- Metropolitan Council members should not be local elected officials or be directly elected to the office of Metropolitan Council member; and
- A nominating committee should recommend a slate of Metropolitan Council nominees to the Governor, as part of an open appointment process that includes citizen, local government and legislative influence on appointments.

At its convention in 2019 the Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues of Women Voters (CMAL) formally adopted the above updated positions with respect to Metropolitan Council governance.

Our 2019 Metropolitan Council Governance report, including the various proposed positions, are included in the Blue Ribbon Committee Report, which is available to the Task Force.

Note: Only 30% of elected officials we interviewed favored appointment of elected officials to Metropolitan Council. Those who did not felt that elected officials were better at communicating and would increase accountability. Of the 70% who did not support appointment of local elected officials, they said

such officials would not have the time, since most local elected officials also have full- time jobs, and they have incompatible interests associated with serving two different constituencies.