

Minnesota



Legislative Manual

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Dedication of Blue Book

The Right to Vote, Cornerstone of Democracy

This Blue Book is dedicated to you, the voters of Minnesota. Thanks to your devoted civic engagement we consistently lead the nation in voter turnout.

As citizens we make our voices heard by exercising our constitutional right to vote. Our nation's founders waged an armed struggle against Great Britain not to win the right to establish a new form of monarchy, but to create a new form of government — a representative democracy “of the people, by the people and for the people,” as Lincoln noted at Gettysburg 150 years ago this November.

While our voting rights are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, each state has some discretion in administering elections. Some states have everyone vote by mail as is the case in more than 500 Minnesota townships. And in most states, citizens can vote prior to Election Day at county courthouses and city halls. In Minnesota we call this “in-person absentee voting.” Election law changes almost always produce lively debate — helping ensure balance and compromise in changing the way we exercise “the right that protects all other rights.”

Last year our right to vote here in Minnesota was subject of much debate. Citizens weighed in on a constitutional amendment related to elections, legislators discussed new voting restrictions, and federal and state courts issued significant opinions on a wide range of right-to-vote issues.

U.S. District Judge Donovan Frank was asked to review the constitutionality of Minnesota's Election Day voter-registration system (*Minnesota Voters Alliance, et al v. Ritchie, et al*). In the early 1970s, state legislators had a spirited debate over whether a voter-registration system should be imposed statewide. Many argued against it as a potential barrier to voting. The compromise they came up with was requiring voter registration but with a procedure developed by Wyoming allowing eligible citizens to register on Election Day. More than a dozen other states have adopted similar laws, all of which enjoy a much higher voter turnout than states that have not adopted same-day voter registration.

In his opinion, Judge Frank affirmed the constitutionality of Minnesota's election law system — including same-day registration — and stressed that it was a primary responsibility of our government to do everything in its power to protect the right to vote. Nearly 528,000 Minnesotans benefited from his ruling in the November 2012 elections, making use of Election Day voter registration to update their addresses or register for the first time. Another significant judicial decision that affirmed our right to vote was made by Minnesota District Judge Jay Quam regarding the rights of Minnesota citizens in a guardianship relationship (*In re the Guardianship of Brian W. Erickson*). In this case, the person who had entered into a guardianship agreement with a local non-profit sought to clarify his right to vote as a citizen. Judge Quam affirmed this right and declared that any effort to restrict the right to vote of Minnesotans in guardianship relationships was not allowed under the U.S. Constitution.

While it is the citizens who keep Minnesota number-one in the nation in voting, this great success is only possible thanks to the dedicated efforts of the more than 30,000 Minnesotans who serve as volunteer election judges, and the thousands of local officials that provide efficient and safe polling places. Thanks to their efforts we set another voter turnout record in 2012.

I am grateful to the generations before us who secured and defended our right to vote — and created our great system of election administration that protects both our constitutional right to vote and the integrity of the process. They have bequeathed to us a system that we work vigilantly to protect and improve. Future generations will be grateful that we have kept Minnesota's democracy strong and they will, I believe, continue our tradition of leading the nation in civic engagement.

The right to vote cannot be overemphasized. In these eloquent yet simple words, Judge Quam captured the essence:

“The importance of this right cannot be overstated in a democratic system where voting is an act of self-definition and an expression of deeply held personal beliefs. It is also not solely a personal right without the potential for great societal consequence...the votes of a few can change the course of our nation.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Ritchie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

Mark Ritchie
Minnesota Secretary of State

Foreword

The Blue Book received its name due to its content, not its cover color. Bartlett's Dictionary of Americanisms explains the term "Blue Book" as "a printed book containing the names of all persons holding office under the Government of the United States."

The Minnesota Blue Book is published biennially in odd-numbered years under the direction of the secretary of state. The 2013-2014 edition contains statistical, historical and constitutional information about the state of Minnesota. It also provides information on state, federal, and local government elected officials and agencies.

I would like to thank all of the state, federal and local government officials, state agency, judicial and legislative staff, and the Office of the Secretary of State staff who have contributed to the 2013-2014 edition. A special thank you to the Minnesota Historical Society and Minnesota Legislative Library for helping provide the voting rights materials.

Mark Ritchie
Minnesota Secretary of State

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