



# SENATE DISTRICT 66

DFL NEWSLETTER *February 2024*

## ATTEND PRECINCT CAUCUSES!

Senate District 66 DFL  
Precinct Caucuses

Washington Technology  
Washington Technology  
Magnet School

1495 Rice Street  
St Paul, MN 55117

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

All 30 precincts in SD66 DFL will meet in the same building. Registration starts at 6:30 p.m. or earlier, the meetings are called to order at 7:00 p.m., and adjourned by 9:00 p.m.

[You can confirm your precinct here.](#)

Why bother to participate in precinct caucuses? They provide nice opportunities to get together with neighbors every two years to help organize the local DFL party unit and discuss issues. The resolutions we pass will feed through the convention system up to the state level, where they can influence the party platform. You will have the opportunity to chat with local elected officials and candidates who stop by the precinct caucus. This evening is also when you can be elected as a delegate or alternate to the next level of conventions, which is our SD66 convention.

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# Work continues between sessions

by Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten

Although work at the Minnesota Capitol generally slows down after session, I still have so much to share with you.

Happy New Year! In 2024, the Minnesota State Legislature is scheduled to convene on February 12. I'm eager to get back to work at the Capitol for you!

Last month, marked the end of the [States Project Fellowship](#). I was honored to be one of eighteen state legislators across the country selected for this program. At our final convening in New York, we discussed key policy proposals, set agendas for upcoming sessions, and shared best practices. The States Project fosters collaboration among states for shared progress. I am so appreciative of their support!

I also participated in a Youth Justice Roundtable alongside Representatives Matt Norris and Sandra Feist. We brought together youth workers, law enforcement members, and community organizations to discuss the challenges facing our youth entangled in the justice system. We will be introducing a bill this session aimed at addressing these issues. Stay tuned for more updates on that effort!

I attended the African Economic Development Solutions (AEDS) fifteenth anniversary celebration. For over a decade, AEDS has built wealth within Minnesota's African immigrant communities through their economic development services. They have provided millions in grants and loans to help African immigrants develop businesses across Minnesota. As the daughter of an African immigrant and small business owner, I am especially grateful for their work.

I visited the University of Minnesota's Community-University Health Care Center (CUHCC) in Minneapolis. CUHCC, a community clinic with over fifty years of service, provides health care, mental health, and dental services to individuals of all ages, races, ethnicities, and languages. The clinic also assists the community in accessing resources such as food, shelter, and prescription refills. They welcome everyone and provide quality, affordable health care to all. I believe health care is a fundamental right. We can learn a lot from CUHCC to make this a reality for all Minnesotans.

Addressing worker misclassification remains a top priority for me and the members of the [Attorney General's Task Force](#). At our December meeting, we heard testimony from workers in the gig and platform economy including Uber and Lyft drivers. As we approach the legislative session, I am eager to craft policy proposals with the task force to address worker misclassification.

As we wrap up the holiday season, I want to extend heartfelt wishes to you and your loved ones. I spent the holidays in England, visiting my family overseas. This quality time with my loved ones left me feeling recharged and ready for the work ahead this year.

Important tax season updates are included at the end of this article.

Thank you again for your ongoing support and engagement! Your insights and perspectives drive our work, and together, we shape legislation for Senate District 66. Please reach out to my office to request information, meetings, or provide your input. For those requests, or any others, contact my legislative assistant, Tristan Voegeli at [tristan.voegeli@senate.mn](mailto:tristan.voegeli@senate.mn).

I hope to hear from you soon!

## Tax season updates: More money back for you!

As tax season is now upon us, here are some updates on your refund options:

- In 2023, DFLers allocated \$300 million to cut property taxes, part of the state's largest-ever tax cut.
- This includes \$1.13 billion in tax rebate checks, \$1.24 billion in Social Security tax reductions, and \$1.52 billion in child tax credits.

### Homeowner benefits:

- Homestead Credit Refund increased by 20.57 percent for 2023 property taxes.
- Maximum refund is \$3,140 for homeowners with income under \$128,280.
- Partial Market Value Exclusion now applies to homesteads under \$517,200

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### Renter gains:

- Renter's Refund increased by 20.57 percent.
- Refund is up to \$2,440 for households making under \$69,520.
- In 2024, Renter's Refund becomes a Renter's Tax Credit for a simpler process.

### Senior support:

- Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral program was expanded.
- Income eligibility increased to under \$96,000.
- Ownership requirement eligibility was reduced to five years.

### Farm relief:

- First-tier market value increased to \$3.5 million, providing \$2,400 in expected property tax savings.

### Additional relief measures:

- Public Safety Aid is \$300 million for cities, counties, and tribal governments.
- Local Government Aid and County Program Aid was increased.



## New laws bring positive changes

by Rep. Leigh Finke, SD66A

As we settle into 2024, I send you my heartfelt wishes for a year filled with joy and exciting possibilities. This year began with several impactful bills taking effect, bringing positive changes to Minnesotans' lives. These include:

- Stronger tenant protections: New laws strengthen protections for renters, promoting fairer housing practices and stability for Minnesotans. [Read more below.](#)
  - Transparency in hiring: Prohibiting past-pay disclosure in the hiring process helps combat wage discrimination and promotes fairer hiring practices.
  - Free menstrual products: School districts and charter schools must now provide free menstrual products to students, ensuring period equity and removing a barrier to education.
- Earned sick and safe time: Nearly all workers in Minnesota now have the right to accrue paid sick and safe time, offering greater security and flexibility in managing personal needs.
  - [Pay increases for home care workers](#)

This list just scratches the surface. Last year we made historic movements that will improve the lives of all Minnesotans, like paid family medical leave, providing free school meals for students, codifying reproductive freedom, and providing emergency funding for food shelves across the state.

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It was an honor to lead the first Queer Caucus at the Minnesota Legislature. We have a massive responsibility to our LGBTQIA2S+ communities and their families to ensure we make our state a place of refuge and protection against the rise of hateful legislation from extremist Republicans across the country. Another major celebration to note is our fight to invest \$2 million in grant funding for gender-inclusive school restrooms in our schools.

I am so grateful to represent my district, my community, and Minnesota. I love this work and will do it tirelessly alongside my colleagues to build a Minnesota where every family thrives, and every child inherits a legacy of opportunity. These new laws represent a step forward in achieving a shared future that represents the state

of Minnesota. I look forward to continuing to champion policies that make our state a better place for all.

You can read my legislative report here to learn more about the direct accomplishments of our district. I look forward to the 2024 legislative session and bringing more achievements back to our community.

Summaries of all laws passed by the 2023 Legislature are available online from nonpartisan [House Public Information Services](#).

Thank you for the honor of representing our vibrant district at the Capitol.

### **Cold weather rule**

Minnesota's "cold weather rule" is now in effect. It protects residents from having electric- or natural-gas service shut off between October 1 and April 30. To ensure your service is safe from disconnection you must make and keep a payment plan that you and your utility provider agree on. More information is available on the Minnesota Department of Commerce's [website](#).

To get help keeping the heat on, call (651) 296-0406 or (800) 657-3782, or email the Consumer Affairs Office at [consumer.puc@state.mn.us](mailto:consumer.puc@state.mn.us).

### **New tenant protection laws**

Minnesota took a big step forward for renters in 2024 with the enactment of several new tenant protection laws. These laws will make it easier for renters to find and keep affordable housing and will help to ensure that they are treated fairly by their landlords. Tenants facing eviction for nonpayment will now have a crucial fourteen-day notice period to address the issue before the landlord can file. Additionally, unwelcome visits are a thing of the past, with landlord entry restricted to 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. and requiring at least 24 hours' notice.

Despite being one of the coldest states in which to live, Minnesota had no statewide law requiring landlords maintain a minimum temperature for rental units. Starting January 1, Minnesota landlords will be required to keep rental units at a minimum of 68 degrees from October to April, if the tenant does not control the thermostat.

While there's more to be done, these significant steps mark a pivotal shift towards ensuring winter stability and empowering tenants with greater peace of mind. Moreover, these critical steps are essential in combating the housing/homelessness crisis in our state.

You can find more provisions included in the public safety and judiciary finance bill directed at landlord and tenant relations here: <https://www.house.mn.gov/hinfo/leginfo/01012024NewLaws.pdf>.

### **Minnesota Values Project survey**

Almost seven years ago, the Minnesota House DFL started the Minnesota Values Project (also known as MVP), a partnership between Minnesotans, elected officials, and organizations to create a shared vision for the future of our state. Working together, we've strengthened our communities by improving education opportunities, making affordable health care a reality, and increasing economic prosperity for all Minnesotans—yet we know there is more to do. As we approach the 2024 session, which begins February 12, I would like to hear your input on creating solutions as we set our next agenda and deliver on our shared values. As part of this effort, I would appreciate it if you took part in the new Minnesota Values Project survey that only takes a few minutes. As we build a shared vision for our state, your input is crucial in this process.

Take the survey today by clicking this [link](#).

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## Winter warming space

In preparation for the coldest winter months, Ramsey County has opened winter warming spaces in Saint Paul for residents who are experiencing homelessness. Through the end of March 2024, several locations will be open every night for people needing a warm place.

Warming gear, like hats and gloves, light snacks, and hot beverages will be provided. A free shuttle service will also operate each day to help transport people to and from warming spaces. Ramsey County housing services and support staff will be answering calls and emails to help refer people to available warming spaces or extra shelter beds.

To learn more, call (651) 266-1050, or visit [ramseycounty.us/WarmingSpaces](https://ramseycounty.us/WarmingSpaces).

## Stay connected

If you haven't yet, you can "like" and follow my [official State Representative Facebook page](#) to keep up with my work. I also invite you to contact my office with any questions or comments you may have at (651) 296-3824 or [rep.leigh.finke@house.mn.gov](mailto:rep.leigh.finke@house.mn.gov). I will be happy to assist you.

For broader legislative information, you can access the Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Services for nonpartisan recaps of high-profile bills, committee hearings, and floor sessions with their [Session Daily](#) publication.

## Committee assignments:

Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
Human Services Policy  
Judiciary Finance and Civil Law  
Legacy Finance

## Legislative assistant

Robin Mercer-Taylor  
[robin.mercer-taylor@house.mn.gov](mailto:robin.mercer-taylor@house.mn.gov)

## RAMSEY COUNTY NEWS

### High hopes for 2024

by Commissioner and Chair Trista Martinson



Happy New Year SD66 DFLers! I'm excited to share a few updates about the work we've been doing at Ramsey County and some key dates to look forward to.

It was my honor this year to be elected by my colleagues as Chair of the Board of Commissioners for a third consecutive year. Over the past two years, we've successfully pivoted away from our immediate post-COVID response setup and began laying the groundwork for progress. This year, we will begin rolling out new services and key initiatives including a cutting-edge Food Scraps Pickup system using durable compostable bags; an Appropriate Response system assisting first responders with mental health professionals, public health workers, or community partners depending on the situation; and much more. With your help, we continue to work on our mission to create a county of excellence working with you to enhance our quality of life.

Thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to our continued collaboration for the betterment of Ramsey County.



# Save Minnesota's precious lakes and streams: use less salt!

by Gwen Willems

## Minnesota waterways endangered by deicing with salt

Recent news from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) reinforces the need for us to reduce the use of sodium chloride (salt) outdoors. According to the MPCA, sixty-seven waterways have made the biennial list of Minnesota waterways (major lakes and streams) damaged by sodium chloride. The actual number is believed to be higher, since only about 10 percent of bodies of water have been tested. As little as one teaspoon of salt is enough to pollute five gallons of water.

Brook Asleson with the MPCA said thirteen bodies of water have been added to the list since two years ago. "This is a pretty big jump," said Asleson (Jason Rantala, WCCO News, January 18, 2024).

### The problem

Sodium chloride damages property and the environment and harms fish, insects, and plants. In the Twin Cities metro, an estimated 365,000 tons of salt are applied to roads each year. For a sense of scale, that's how much the Empire State Building in New York City weighs. "Deicing salts did come up as the number one source of chloride," said Asleson (Jason Rantala, WCCO News, January 18, 2024).

City weighs. "Deicing salts did come up as the number one source of chloride," said Asleson (Jason Rantala, WCCO News, January 18, 2024).

Unfortunately, there's no way to remove salt.

### Alternatives

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is increasingly using brine as a substitute for rock salt. That only reduces the amount of salt applied. The brine MnDOT uses is about 23 percent salt, and just like rock salt, it lowers the freezing point to help clear ice and snow (Chloe Johnson, *Star Tribune*, January 27, 2024).

Residents can use sand or grit instead of salt products. Conscientious weeping and shoveling snow can lessen the need to apply products.

### Efforts to educate and reduce salt use

Through its [Smart Salting certification and refresher training](#), the MPCA educates winter maintenance professionals in ways to reduce their salt use while maintaining safety and minimizing impacts on the environment and infrastructure. Success stories illustrate the effectiveness of the training. MPCA also offers trainings for property managers, business owners, and environmental professionals and online workshops for community leaders.

The goal is for organizations and homeowners to apply as little salt as needed. "Reducing a little bit of salt can go a long way to protecting our water resources," said Asleson.

### Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota

The Hennepin County Chloride Initiative created [Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota](#) for implementation by local government units in their communities. It's an innovative research-based program that builds community capacity to maintain winter safety while reducing chloride-based deicer use. A variety of water management organizations are promoting Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota and providing program support, such as the [Watershed Stewards](#) of our local watershed district, [Capitol Region](#).

Low Salt, No Salt Minnesota points out that "the alternatives to chloride have other tradeoffs in cost, environmental impacts, and service. Therefore, the leading strategy for managing chloride pollution is to be smart about its use; applying it only when, where, and in the amount needed. This also means that every effort, big or small, helps reduce chloride pollution!"

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The program has a powerful toolbox to be delivered locally by governmental units, such as cities and watershed management organizations. Use of these excellent tools can increase awareness and provide support for private landowners to help us reduce chloride pollution from our properties. Any of us can access this information from our computers.

Whether to improve your individual knowledge or to reach out to your local residents, the toolbox items are helpful. They include a facilitator guide, training options, presentation, videos, PowerPoints, discussion tips, pledge form, recruitment letter, instructive flyer, graphics, and FAQs.

A little awareness and knowledge about use of sodium chloride can do a lot. Working together we can increase our care for the environment.

*Gwen is co-chair of the Capitol Region Watershed District Community Advisory Committee.*

## SD66 invites applications for chair

With the resignation of Remy K. Huerta-Stemper, SD66 needs a new chair. Consider running for this position. The following is the description in the DFL State Constitution. Other SD66 volunteers will also help the new chair get to know the role.

**CHAIR:** It shall be the duty of the Chair to convene the Convention (following the procedures described in the Call) and preside at meetings of the Central Committee and Executive Committee. The Chair shall attend meetings of the State and Congressional District Central Committees. The Chair shall also perform all other duties incident to the office.

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## CALENDAR

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### Presidential Primary

Early voting is now open; [request a ballot](#) for the party of your choice. In-person voting is from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on March 5, Super Tuesday.

### Precinct Caucuses

Tuesday, February 27, 6:30/7:00-9:00 p.m.  
Washington Technology Magnet School  
1495 Rice Street St Paul, MN 55117

### Organizing meeting for SD66 Convention planning committees

Date/time/place TBD

### SD66 Convention

Date/time/place TBD

### CD4 Convention

Saturday, May 4, registration begins at 11:00 a.m., convention convenes at noon  
North Central Regional Council of Carpenters Headquarters  
700 Olive Street  
Saint Paul, MN 55130-9825

### State DFL Convention

Friday, May 31- Sunday, June 2  
Duluth

*Events are subject to change. Visit our website at <http://sd66-dfl.org/> for updates.*

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## Elected officials

### Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten

(651) 296-8866  
sen.coumouverbeten@senate.mn

### Rep. Leigh Finke (66A)

(651) 296-3824  
rep.leigh.finke@house.mn

### Rep. Athena Hollins (66B)

(651) 296-4224  
rep.athena.hollins@house.mn

### County Commissioner

#### Mary Jo McGuire - Dist. 2

(651) 266-8356  
maryjo.mcguire@co.ramsey.mn.us

### County Commissioner

#### Trista Martinson - Dist. 3

(651) 266-8360  
trista.matascastillo@co.ramsey.mn.us

## DFL contacts

### City of Roseville DFL

Linda Zelig, Interim Chair  
(612) 747-7244  
lmzelig@gmail.com

### Senate District 66 DFL

Remy K. Huerta-Stemper, Chair  
(605) 920-0252  
sd66dfl@gmail.com

### City of St. Paul DFL

Garrison McMurtrey, Chair  
stpauldflmn@gmail.com

### Ramsey County DFL

Russ Warren, Chair  
(763) 786-3591  
russellawarren@gmail.com

### 4th District DFL

Greg Hansen, Chair  
(763) 438-6142  
GregHansenDFL@aol.com

### Minnesota State DFL

Ken Martin, Chair  
(651) 293-1200  
chair@dfll.org

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The *Senate District 66 DFL Newsletter* is published four times a year to inform and educate all interested parties in the activities and issues of SD66 DFLers including elected officials and endorsed candidates. Please contact the editor if you are interested in joining the newsletter committee or submitting an article for publication.

### Newsletter committee

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