



[our] mnisota



A SHARED VISION FOR FREEDOM,
JUSTICE & EQUITY IN OUR STATE.



POWER TO THE PEOPLE

“IF YOU HAVE COME HERE TO HELP ME, YOU ARE WASTING YOUR TIME. BUT IF YOU HAVE COME BECAUSE YOUR LIBERATION IS BOUND UP WITH MINE, THEN LET US WORK TOGETHER.”

- LILLA WATSON

finding our way

2016 was a tumultuous year in the lives of Americans. Our political landscape has developed further into a space that makes so many people, especially the most marginalized, feel unsafe, unsure and uneasy about their future in our country and communities. We know that the politics of hate do not accidentally hurt and divide us; they intentionally diminish the humanity of Indigenous people and people of color. The climate is harsh and emotionally draining, and people across the country feel increasingly hopeless. So what do we do? We zoom in.

We focus on the power of small groups of people dedicated to impacting state and local government. Closer to home, we find more opportunities for us to raise our voices and stand together, to express our vision for what our state, our cities, our blocks should look like. We bring you a piece of this vision in this document, *our mnisota: a shared vision for freedom, justice and equity in our state*.

We use *mnisota* in lieu of Minnesota to honor the original Dakota words *Mni Sota Makoce*, a term that, according to Dakota elder *Chris MatoNunpa* translates to “land where the waters reflect the clouds.” We believe that our end goal— racial justice and the end of all racial disparities—isn’t possible without first acknowledging the history of the land that we occupy: land which was stolen from Dakota people, people who had lived here since time immemorial and were killed or forcibly expelled in order for us to live here today.

We stand in solidarity with indigenous voices and tribal nations across the world struggling to protect the sacredness of water. Water is the lifeblood of the universe that nourishes every person, every plant, and every community. Water can provide us with the healing that we so desperately need in times like these. Water can be still, it can be peaceful, but it can also be a powerful force for change. Just like us. We can transform, and in that process transform the environment around us.

In that spirit, *our mnisota* advances a vision of racial equity that, like water, aims to nourish every person, every plant, and every community in our state. It seeks to transform us, to transform our state and transform the way we think about racial equity.

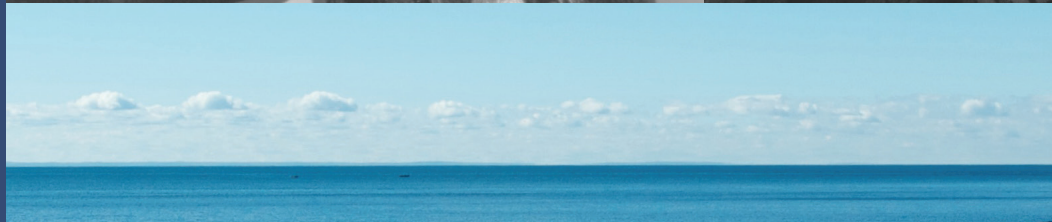
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Our Minnesota started with a community forum at the Minneapolis American Indian Center. We gathered organizers, parents, policy analysts, and everyday folks who were interested in working on many different areas of racial justice. We started our conversations with a broad frame: What would our ideal state look like? In each policy area, our agenda includes both specific policy solutions and broad visions brought forth by community members.

Tribal Sovereignty

Minnesota is home to eleven tribal governments - seven Ojibwe Bands and four Dakota communities. Minneapolis has one of the largest urban American Indian populations in the country, representing a diverse array of tribal citizens from many of the 562 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Tribal sovereignty refers to the inherent rights of American Indian tribes to govern themselves and their lands, to define their own membership, and to



“THE OPPOSITE OF POVERTY IS NOT WEALTH. IN TOO MANY PLACES, THE OPPOSITE OF POVERTY IS JUSTICE.”

Bryan Stevenson

regulate tribal commerce and other domestic relations. In order to honor tribal sovereignty among American Indian communities in our state, we ask legislators to pass bills that:

- Establish the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples Day.
- Continue to appropriate funding for the preservation and revitalization of Dakota and Ojibwe languages.
- Create environmental protections for wild rice stock.
- Support the inherent right of American Indian tribes to petition the federal government to put land owned by a tribe into a trust.
- Stop sulfide mining on tribal lands and prevent the building of additional pipelines.

Civil Rights

Minnesotans are proud of our state’s reputation of being one of the most progressive states in the union. But that pride is overshadowed by the dramatic racial and economic disparities in our state. Building a racially equitable state means working with communities of color and American Indian communities throughout our cities to restore integrity and trust in our civil rights institutions and police departments. This means creating opportunities for officers to work in communities of color and American Indian communities in non-enforcement ways (e.g., Police Athletic Leagues), defining community policing in concert with communities of

color and American Indian communities, replacing school resource officers with community based representatives and elders to promote a climate of care and intergenerational respect in schools, and diversifying police forces by hiring more women and men of color.

We ask legislators to pass bills that:

- Revise criteria, screening, and eligibility for law enforcement to be community-oriented, problem-solving, and de-escalating instead of arrest driven.
- Create transparency with how body cameras are used for viewing and/or releasing footage.
- Continue the practice of the Controlled Substance Sentencing

Reform bill that became law in 2016 by treating drug abuse and mental health issues as health issues rather than as criminal issues.

- Support civil asset forfeiture reform initiatives. Police should not be able to take any property until after there is a conviction.
- Support the Restore the Vote - Minnesota Coalition’s efforts to give the right to vote back to formerly incarcerated women and men. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Minnesota, 1 in 8 African American men are barred from voting due to disenfranchisement and 5.9% of American Indian Minnesotans are disenfranchised compared to 1.1% of

white Minnesotans.

- End prison gerrymandering. Counting incarcerated women and men, many of whom are people of color, as residents of the municipalities in which they are confined results in a distorted image of the demographic makeup of a community. This means that districts with prisons receive greater representation, even though Minnesota’s incarcerated individuals do not have the right to vote. Redistricting population data to reflect incarcerated persons at their residential address prior to incarceration would ensure more accurate representation.



“OVERCOMING POVERTY IS NOT A GESTURE OF CHARITY. IT IS AN ACT OF JUSTICE. IT IS THE PROTECTION OF A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT, THE RIGHT TO DIGNITY AND A DECENT LIFE.”

Nelson Mandela



Economic Equity

Even as incomes are rising, poverty rates are falling, and unemployment is back to pre-recession levels in Minnesota. U.S. Census data show that most communities of color in our state have median incomes significantly less than that of white Minnesotans. Soon, these gaps may create a statewide economic crisis. The health of our state’s economic future depends on the economic well-being of all Minnesotans.

We ask legislators to promote economic opportunity by supporting legislation that:

- Offers technical support to assist entrepreneurs in launching or expanding a small business or a co-op, especially small business owners who

are men and women of color, working class, veterans, and/or people with disabilities.

- Reduces fees and fines for minor traffic violations, which disproportionately affect Black and LatinX communities.
- Expands the Working Family Credit, including making the credit available to more workers and families, increasing the amount of the credit they can receive, and extending the credit to workers between the ages of 21 and 25 who do not have dependents.
- Allocates funding to support new Career Pathways partnerships among employers, social service agencies, and institutions of higher education, to support workforce development and address opportunity gaps in American

Indian communities and communities of color.

- Allocates funding to increase the MFIP cash grant by \$100.00 per month.
- Increases Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) funding for workforce training and development.
- Increases funding for Minnesota’s Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to make childcare more affordable for working families of color. It would provide access to Basic Sliding Fee for wait-listed families and empower parents utilizing CCAP to find the provider that best meets their child’s needs.

Housing

Given the epidemic of rental apartment conversions to market rate properties and “flipping” by speculative real estate firms, the state needs to respond with urgency to a chronic shortage of affordable housing options across Minnesota. Innovative approaches to the current housing crisis are happening across the state. For example, the Duluth Landlord Initiative is a model that incentivizes landlords to rent to formerly incarcerated women and men. The CHUM model provides emergency shelter services for Duluth residents, including displaced youth and people with mental health issues. These are models which should be adopted all across the state.

We call on legislators to pass bills that:

- Remove barriers that prevent rental properties from being put into the hands of responsible owners by enacting statutes authorizing expedited tax foreclosure procedures for vacant properties.
- Advance equity and safety in renting by expunging unlawful detainers from rental history, by establishing cold weather housing standards for rental units, by reducing expensive fees for rental housing application and background checks, and by establishing mandatory lead testing for rental housing.
- End discrimination by landlords against individuals that have Section 8 vouchers.
- Ban The Box: enact just cause rules that prevent landlords from

denying housing based on a criminal background or from evicting people based on such a background in their rental housing application.

- Require new developers who want to take over a building, increase rent, and change rental requirements, to provide notice to tenants, the city, and the state Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) a year in advance.
- Allocate funding in the budget for downpayment assistance.
- Extend Manufactured Home Park Closure Notice laws to all tenants in Minnesota by requiring apartment owners to give residents 12 months notice when a building is being sold and that gives renters the right to organize to purchase the building under a Right of First Refusal statute.



Education Equity

According to the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership (MNEEP) 2016 State of Students of Color and American Indians Report, racial disparities in educational outcomes have not ended, and the ability to “close gaps” among students of color and Native American students in Minnesota has been slow. A statewide vision for equitable schools would include establishing government subsidized living wages for teachers, the creation of meditation and mindfulness programs in schools, ethnic studies pilot programs in K-12 schools throughout the state, programs that re-engage children who are no longer in school, and programs to enable elders from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds to work in schools.

In order to advance this vision, we ask legislators to support bills that:

1. Advance the efforts of the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers (TOCAIT) in Minnesota. The Coalition will advance the following proposals during the 2017 legislative session:

- Support pathways to teaching for

“ WE ARE WHAT WE IMAGINE. OUR VERY EXISTENCE CONSISTS OF OUR IMAGINATION OF OURSELVES. OUR BEST DESTINY IS TO IMAGINE, AT LEAST, COMPLETELY, WHO AND WHAT, AND THAT WE ARE. THE GREATEST TRAGEDY THAT CAN BEFALL US IS TO GO UNIMAGINED. ”

-N. Scott Momaday

youth, paraprofessionals, and career changers from American Indian communities and communities of color.

- Provide induction and retention support.
- Eliminate discriminatory teacher testing requirements.
- Provide scholarship incentives, student teaching stipends, and loan forgiveness for teaching service.
- Transform climate and curriculum in pre K-12 schools and colleges/ universities.

2. Support the efforts of the Minnesota Alliance for Early/Middle College Success. As our state works to reach the GradNation goal of a 90% high school graduation rate by 2020, the expansion of programs like Early/Middle College will be critical in creating college futures

for all of Minnesota’s students.

3. Support the Solutions not Suspensions Coalition proposals. Students of color, especially Native American and Black students, face disproportionately high suspension rates. The Coalition will advance the following proposals during the 2017 legislative session:

- Ban zero tolerance policies and other exclusionary measures.
- Improve data collection and reporting on suspensions, expulsions and other classroom and school removals.
- Improve the disciplinary process by identifying procedures for what must happen before, during, and after a suspension, expulsion, or exclusion.
- Provide additional K-12 educator training and support, coupled with necessary funding.

Health Equity

Everyone in Minnesota deserves to live in a healthy community. The health and wellbeing of an individual should not depend on their race, identity, education, gender, place of origin, or where they live. In order to advance health equity, efforts need to be intentional in addressing structural racism. Therefore, health care policies must pay attention to the social determinants of health, and must be developed in partnership with impacted communities, including communities of color and Indigenous communities.

We ask legislators to pass bills that:

- Include alternative medicine (indigenous practices/non traditional medicine) as part of the health care system.

- Provide state funding for authentic community engagement on public policy decisions about health.
- Establish State Agency Cultural and Ethnic Leadership Councils to propose, implement and evaluate the impacts of health care policies.
- Provide health care access for non US citizens.
- Improve data collection practices to better understand the health disparities among different racial, ethnic, and cultural communities.
- Protect and build on Minnesota’s leadership in expanding access to affordable health care coverage.

Food Justice

Hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans live in food deserts, areas where they don’t have access to fruits and vegetables, dairy, whole grains, and lean

meats and poultry. Without access to these foods, people are forced to rely on diets made up of heavily processed foods that don’t help children grow up strong or help adults stay healthy. This means that residents, particularly those who live in working class neighborhoods, face much greater challenges finding affordable, fresh produce, and other foods necessary to maintain a healthy diet. Where a person lives in our state should not determine whether or not they have access to nutritious food options. Therefore, we ask legislators to:

- Build on the \$250,000 investment made by the state during the 2016 legislative session by supporting the Good Food Access Fund Campaign’s efforts to seek \$10 million in annual appropriations to address the need for equitable healthy food access solutions around the state.

Safe Harbor

Sex trafficking and sexual exploitation disproportionately impact youth of color and American Indian youth. In 2013, the state of Minnesota made the largest state investment in the provision of services for sexually exploited youth nationwide. To date, more than \$8 million dollars has been invested in Safe Harbor programs per biennium. This funds three state agencies to implement *No Wrong Door*, including protocol development and implementation, specialized services, housing and shelter, outreach, training, and evaluation.

We ask legislators to build on these investments by:

- Allocating \$2.3 million in additional funding for shelter/housing, services, outreach, training and technical assistance for regional navigators and other grantees, and protocol implementation - with an emphasis on Greater Minnesota, along with culturally specific housing, services, and additional supports for tribal nations.



“IN TODAY’S CLIMATE IN OUR COUNTRY, WHICH IS SICKENED WITH THE POLLUTION OF POLLUTION, RIDDLED WITH BURGEONING RACISM, RIFE WITH GROWING HUDDLES OF HOMELESS, WE NEED ART AND WE NEED ART IN ALL FORMS. WE NEED ALL METHODS OF ART TO BE PRESENT, EVERYWHERE PRESENT, AND ALL THE TIME PRESENT.”

MAYA ANGELOU

Immigration Justice

Minnesota flourishes when the men and women who come to our state from other countries are able to live in dignity and peace, and contribute to our economy, democracy, and culture. Yet immigration policies and practices continue to negatively impact Black and Brown people disproportionately. Despite federal threats to immigration justice, including increased deportation and expansion of detention centers, Minnesota can take the lead in state level reform.

We ask legislators to pass bills that:

- Support drivers licenses for all persons, regardless of immigration status. This proposal would allow people who reside in Minnesota to use a foreign-issued passport and foreign

birth certificate - translated into English - as proof of identity.

- Create programs and funding opportunities that promote and support undocumented immigrant homeownership.
- Create sanctuary cities throughout our state.
- Train state ICE agents with better skills to engage, respect, and humanize detainees and immigrants.

Justice for Incarcerated Women, Men, and Youth

Minnesota’s correctional facilities continue to impact Native American communities and communities of color disproportionately. The rates of disparity for youth of color in the Minnesota justice system are both higher than national levels and more severe in magnitude than those of many

comparable states.

In order to advance justice in our state’s correctional facilities, we ask legislators to pass bills that:

- Treat incarcerated individuals with human dignity, including offering nutritious food and adequate health care.
- Create the office of prison ombudsman as a way to give incarcerated women and men a way to address grievances, including the improper use of solitary confinement.
- Restrict the use of solitary confinement. Minnesota should develop a shorter time limit, stricter guidelines for use, and ban placing youth in solitary confinement, as the federal government has already done.
- Eliminate all private prisons in our state.
- Oppose three strikes as part of any sentencing bill.

- Allocate more funding for alternatives to incarceration, including more funding for chemical dependency treatment, mental health treatment, and other forms of treatment.
- Adopt objective screening tools for youth detention that align with the least restrictive language in the current state statutes.
- Encourage the identification and funding of community-based, culturally specific alternatives to detention which have shown to be generally more effective at ensuring better outcomes for youth. This approach aligns with the national discussion around the importance of engaging affected communities, youth and families in the reform process.
- Establish data collection and analysis practices that contextualize the scope, nature, and magnitude of

the utilization of the juvenile justice system. Disaggregate data at all major juvenile justice system decision points by race, ethnicity, and gender. To the extent possible further disaggregate data by geography and offense.

Arts & Culture

Minnesota has a unique history of cultivating major artists who have influenced people all over the world. Legislators can build on this legacy by investing in the emerging artists of today who will influence the future. It is artists who allow us to heal and who give creative expression to what it means to be human. Our state must recognize how art and culture influence every aspect of life and support legislation that elevates the value of the arts in all of our communities.

Therefore, we ask legislators to pass bills

that:

- Support afterschool programs and programs in correctional facilities devoted to arts and culture.
- Invest in critical exchanges with communities engaged in the creation of art abroad and within our boundaries as a source of inspiration and creative, and healing work.
- Include artists in the creation and implementation of public budgets, public works, education, housing, health, immigration, etc.
- Continue to support network building among artists by allocating financial investments in artists co-ops.
- Support youth entrepreneurship through the arts.
- Establish fully-funded, robust programs for art and cultural education in schools.



VOICES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

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2525 E. Franklin Avenue Suite 301 | Minneapolis, MN 55406
www.voicesforracialjustice.org | 612.746.4224