

# 2014 Capitol Report

## State Senator Bobby Joe Champion



*Dear Friends and Neighbors,*

*Minnesota saw remarkable progress when Democrats were in control of the House, Senate and Governor's office. We were able to accomplish some great things.*

*This year, things have changed. The Minnesota House is controlled by a Republican majority and we are experiencing the challenges of divided government. Some Republicans seem to only be satisfied when government doesn't work.*

*House Republicans showed their hand early this session. They tried to eliminate LGA for Minneapolis, cut wages for tipped employees, kick 90,000 off their affordable health insurance, and threaten the livelihoods of our teachers.*

*Senate DFLers opposed these Republican proposals and we were able to defeat them. While we were able to pass some good things this year, we certainly didn't get everything we wanted in this budget. There were a number of missed opportunities and disappointments. I'm especially disappointed my Restore the Vote legislation didn't pass, but I have not given up on making sure this becomes law. I will continue the fight to make our communities safer, our schools better and opportunities for our citizens greater.*

*Thank you for the honor of representing you. Please feel free to contact me whenever I can be of assistance.*

*Sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Champion".

*Minnesota State Senate*

### Restoring the Right to Vote

I was the chief author of bipartisan legislation to allow Minnesotans who are on parole or probation the right to vote. Minnesota would join 18 other states that grant voting rights to felons on probation or parole.

Despite broad bipartisan support and an incredibly strong coalition backing it, voting rights restoration legislation failed to pass this year. I was able to pass the bill in the DFL-controlled Senate, which marks the first time the bill passed a legislative body. Unfortunately, the bill was never given a hearing in the GOP-controlled House.

The purpose of the bill is to restore voting rights to individuals with felony convictions who live in the community but are unable to vote because they are still on probation, parole or conditional release. This current policy disenfranchises more than 47,000 citizens who are living in our communities and paying taxes; they are unable to vote due to a felony conviction on their record.

My legislation would allow citizens to vote after they are released from jail, rather than the date they complete parole or supervised release, which can be many years. Current law unnecessarily and excessively discourages positive participation, perpetuates racial disparities, and adds cost and complications to voting.

I am proud of the progress that voting rights restoration made this year. The issue is finally getting the attention it deserves. There are a number of legislators from both sides of the aisle on board with passing this legislation, and I am hopeful thousands of Minnesotans will someday have their voting rights restored.



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# SENATOR BOBBY JOE CHAMPION

## STRONG VOICE -- COMMON SENSE -- WORKING FOR YOU



### My Commitment to our Kids and Our Schools

The final education bill after the special session includes \$526 million in new general fund resources for FY 2016-17, including \$346 million to increase funding for school districts on the general education formula by 2% in both FY 2016 and FY 2017.

Although the education bill does not include the statewide universal pre-kindergarten initiative that was a priority for Governor Mark Dayton, it does devote \$96 million to increase funding for initiatives focused on young children, including: \$48 million for early learning scholarships; \$3.5 million for the state's early learning and child care rating system; \$31 million for School Readiness; \$2.8 million for Early Childhood Family Education; and \$10 million for Head Start.

The bill also includes \$5 million for the Northside Achievement Zone, St. Paul Promise Neighborhood and new education partnership pilots that help children succeed by coordinating support for families at school and in their communities.

### My NO Vote Against the Environment Bill

The agreement negotiated between the legislative leaders and Gov. Dayton for the Environment and Agriculture bill included provisions that greatly concerned me. The two most egregious were the elimination of the Pollution Control Agency (PCA) Citizen's Board and the nonferrous mining exemption from solid waste rules.

I was disappointed that the final bill rolls back environmental protections that have been in place for years, but I pledge to work to bring them back next year.

### The fight Continues for Drivers Licenses for All

Under current law, undocumented immigrants cannot get drivers licenses in Minnesota. Drivers licenses are a necessity for immigrants to get to jobs where driving to work is the only option. Thousands of immigrants that live in Minnesota are forced to drive for everyday tasks, like getting to work and taking children to school. I introduced legislation to change that. My bill changes the types of documents needed for people to use as a form of identification that is accepted to receive a driver's license. It retains all the testing requirements to make certain all drivers drive safely on our roads. Additionally, my bill allows licensed drivers to ascertain motor vehicle insurance as they drive on our highways.

Unfortunately, this bill did not become law this year because House Republicans refused to pass it. Republican House leadership does not represent Minnesota families and does not acknowledge how important and basic drivers licenses are to immigrant families. I am committed to continue my work to ensure this bill becomes law.

### Rail Safety

Every day, trains carrying oil and other hazardous materials pass through Minnesota. These trains present real risks to public safety and our natural resources. That is why I co-authored legislation to strengthen Minnesota's ability to prevent disasters, and respond quickly and effectively if they do occur. By improving safety precautions and disaster preparedness, these efforts would improve the safety of Minnesotans living near railroads carrying hazardous materials. Specifically, I have worked to prevent a connector track at the intersection between BNSF and Canadian Pacific (CP) railroad lines. This connector track would increase traffic and allow mile-long trains carrying oil and potentially other hazardous materials through Theo Wirth Park, across I-94, near Target Field, and through downtown Minneapolis.

### HOME Pilot Project

The 2014 Legislature designed the HOME pilot project (Housing Opportunities Made Equitable) to help close the disparity in affordable housing for all communities of color in Minnesota. Last year, I successfully passed legislation to fund the project with a \$60 million appropriation for competitive grants to community organizations to provide financial education, case management, credit mending, home buyer education, and foreclosure prevention mitigation services.

This session, the Senate Housing bill included an additional \$500,000 in funding for the program. Unfortunately, the additional funding did not become law. I will work on legislation to continue funding this important pilot project. The bill was created with the assistance of the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAHA) and has seen widespread support across the state.



### Jobs Bill

I supported the final jobs and economic development budget bill, which included a directive for the commissioner of the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), in collaboration with the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU), to develop and administer a customized training program for skilled manufacturing industries. In addition, I advocated for and received additional resources for youth employment opportunities.

Unfortunately, I was unhappy with a provision that allows a cooperative association or municipal utility to charge an additional fee to net metering customers with a capacity below 40 kilowatts to recover all fixed costs required to serve the customer.