

**STATE OF MINNESOTA
CAMPAIGN FINANCE AND PUBLIC DISCLOSURE BOARD**

**PRIMA FACIE
DETERMINATION**

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPLAINT OF LUKE MIELKE REGARDING THE MINNESOTA DFL STATE
CENTRAL COMMITTEE

On December 1, 2025, the Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board received a complaint submitted by Luke Mielke regarding the Minnesota DFL State Central Committee (DFL Central Committee). The DFL Central Committee is the state committee of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, Board registration number 20003.

The complaint alleges that in October 2025, the DFL Central Committee mailed a citywide sample ballot to Minneapolis voters. The complaint includes a photograph of the sample ballot, which includes the names and photographs of four local candidates: Dan Engelhart for Park Board District 1, Charles Rucker for Park Board District 2; Amber Frederick for Park Board At-Large; and Bob Fine for the Board of Estimate and Taxation. The complaint states that while candidates for the Board of Estimate and Taxation are elected on a citywide basis, and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (Park Board) includes three at-large seats, the Park Board also includes seats to which candidates are elected by voters in six separate districts. Therefore, the complaint alleges that the sample ballot did not include “the names of three or more individuals whose names are to appear on the ballot” with respect to voters in Park Board Districts 3, 4, 5, and 6, which is necessary in order for the sample ballot to be a multicandidate expenditure under Minnesota Statutes section 10A.275, subdivision 1, clause (2).

The complaint cites and quotes from Advisory Opinion 302, which states that in order to qualify as a multicandidate expenditure, a “sample ballot must . . . include the names of at least three individuals whose names will appear on the actual official ballot for the election in question. These individuals may include local or federal candidates in addition to candidates registered with the Board.”¹ The complaint asserts that:

Because the sample ballot only contained two candidates who appeared on the ballot for voters in Districts 3-6, any expenditure by the Minnesota DFL for mailers sent to voters in Districts 3-6 should be considered contributions to or expenditures on behalf of Bob Fine and Amber Fredrick. Contribution limits for those candidates are \$1,000.²

Determination

The complaint alleges a violation of Minnesota Statutes section 10A.275. However, that statute does not require or prohibit any conduct, and cannot be violated. Instead, the statute provides

¹ [Advisory Opinion 302 \(Aug. 28, 1998\)](#).

² See [Minn. Stat. § 211A.12](#).

for six types of exceptions to the general rule that expenditures made by a party unit regarding candidates are either contributions to, or independent expenditures for, those candidates. Therefore, the complaint does not state a prima facie violation of Minnesota Statutes section 10A.275.

The complaint refers to the contribution limits applicable to local candidates. However, the Board lacks jurisdiction over Minnesota Statutes section 211A.12.

It is not clear from the facts alleged in the complaint whether the DFL Central Committee made an expenditure for the sample ballot by the end of the reporting period covered by the 2025 pre-general report of receipts and expenditures, which was October 20, 2025. The DFL Central Committee's 2025 pre-general report does not appear to include an expenditure that clearly encompassed the sample ballot. Also, the complaint does not directly refer to any report filed by the DFL Central Committee. However, the complaint alleges that a portion of the cost of the sample ballot must be reported by the DFL Central Committee as "contributions to or expenditures on behalf of Bob Fine and Amber Fredrick."

Minnesota Statutes section 10A.275, subdivision 1, provides that certain "expenditures by a party unit . . . are not considered contributions to or expenditures on behalf of a candidate for the purposes of section 10A.25 or 10A.27 and must not be allocated to candidates under section 10A.20, subdivision 3, paragraph (h)", including, pursuant to clause (2), "expenditures for the preparation, display, mailing, or other distribution of an official party sample ballot listing the names of three or more individuals whose names are to appear on the ballot". The substance of the multicandidate expenditure category for sample ballots has remained the same since section 10A.275 was enacted into law in 1978.³

The sample ballot depicted in the complaint includes the names of four individuals whose names, according to the complaint, appeared on ballots used by Minneapolis voters in 2025. The question raised by the complaint is whether the phrase "the ballot" has a different meaning with respect to a sample ballot mailed to potential voters who reside in Park Board District 1 or 2, versus the same sample ballot mailed to those who reside in Park Board Districts 3, 4, 5, and 6. The Chair concludes that the answer to that question is no.

Each of the local candidates depicted in the sample ballot appeared on 2025 general election ballots of Minneapolis voters. While voters in Park Board Districts 3, 4, 5, and 6 could only vote for two of the local candidates depicted in the sample ballot, the sample ballot nonetheless included four local candidates whose names appeared on "the ballot" as that term is used within Minnesota Statutes section 10A.275. The statute does not differentiate between the ballot available to voters in one district versus the ballot available to voters in another district. The phrase "the ballot" appears several times within Minnesota Statutes Chapter 10A, and while in some instances there is a distinction made between the primary ballot and the general election

³ See [Minn. Laws 1978, ch. 463, § 83](#).

ballot, there are no provisions in which “the ballot” clearly means something different depending on the district to be represented by a candidate.

In 2023 the legislature amended section 10A.275 to include a new category of multicandidate expenditures, which includes “expenditures for a booth at a community event, county fair, or state fair that benefits three or more individuals whose names are to appear on the ballot”. If the complainant’s interpretation of the phrase “the ballot” is correct, and that phrase has the same meaning in clause (4) as it does in clause (2), that would likely mean that a party unit with a booth at a county fair in an odd-numbered year would need to evaluate whether individuals attending the fair reside in any number of city council districts, school board districts, or other districts, in order to ascertain whether the cost of the booth may be classified as a multicandidate expenditure in full, or in part. The text of the statute does not indicate that such considerations were intended by using the phrase “the ballot”.

In 2003 the Minnesota Court of Appeals addressed a sample ballot in which more than half of the surface area was dedicated to promoting a single candidate.⁴ The Board asserted that section 10A.275 “must be interpreted to require proportional allocation when a multicandidate expenditure benefits primarily one candidate.”⁵ The Court of Appeals disagreed, noting that it was “undisputed that one of the items at issue here is ‘an official party sample ballot listing the names of three or more individuals’ who appeared on the 1998 ballot.”⁶ The court stated:

We are mindful of the board's concerns that, in the absence of an allocation requirement, multicandidate expenditures by political parties on behalf of three or more candidates that benefit primarily one candidate will circumvent meaningful campaign spending limits. Where, as here, the intention of the legislature is clear from the statutory language, resolution of the board's concerns is appropriately the province of the legislature, not the judiciary. In light of the statute's lack of ambiguity, we decline to ignore the language employed by the legislature in order to infer legislative intent from evidence that simply is not present.

Because Minn. Stat. § 10A.275, subd. 1, prohibits allocation of multicandidate expenditures by a political party for sample ballots listing three or more candidates and fundraising efforts on behalf of three or more candidates, the DFL’s expenditures and reports complied with the statute.⁷

The issue raised by the complaint is different than the precise issue addressed by the Court of Appeals in 2003. However, the language in section 10A.275 regarding sample ballots remains substantively the same and does not differentiate between ballots available to voters in one district versus ballots available to voters in another district. Therefore, the complaint does not

⁴ [State Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board v. Minnesota Democratic Farmer Labor Party](#), 671 N.W.2d 894 (Minn. Ct. App. 2003) (addressing [Findings in the Matter of a Complaint regarding the Minnesota DFL State Central Committee \(Oct. 2, 2000\)](#)).

⁵ *Id.* at 898.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.* at 899.

state a prima facie violation of the reporting requirements under Minnesota Statutes section 10A.20, subdivision 3.

Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes section 10A.022, subdivision 3, this prima facie determination is made by the Board chair and not by any vote of the entire Board. The complaint is dismissed without prejudice.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Rashid', is written over a horizontal line.

Faris Rashid, Chair
Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board

Date: December 12, 2025