



For Immediate Release: March 13, 2015

Contact: Becca Clearman 651-296-0556, rebekah.clearman@senate.mn

Capitol Report from Senator Torrey Westrom

Dear Friends,

I hope you had a great week. This week at the Capitol, I had the honor of visiting with a number of my constituents as well as hearing bills in committee and on the senate floor. Three major items discussed this week related to protecting at risk children from domestic abuse (HF8), reinforcing our children's safety and privacy at school (SF1543), and getting ready for the 2016 LCCMR Request for Proposal Deadline on May 11, 2015.

To see the full list of bills I have authored and co-authored this session so far, click here:

<http://bit.ly/1MyMQ4j>

I also had the privilege of welcoming a number of groups for their Day at the Capitol. These groups included Education Minnesota, Schools Equity and Education, Joint Legislative Religious Coalition, Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD), Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCL), and local representatives from the Mental Health Association of Minnesota.

As always, it is an honor to represent Western Minnesota at the Minnesota State Capitol. Please, do not hesitate to contact me with any legislative thoughts, comments or concerns.

Sincerely,

Torrey

Week in Pictures



Joint Legislative Religious Coalition Visits Capitol

This week, the Joint Legislative Religious Coalition visited the Minnesota State Capitol to meet with Sen. Westrom and to voice their support for congregations in Fergus Falls, Alexandria, Grant, and Douglas Counties.



Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts Visits Capitol

District Administrators from North Fork Crow River, Middle Fork Crow River, and Sauk Centre Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts visited Sen. Westrom at the Minnesota State Capitol. In attendance were Tara Ostendorf, Jim Barchenger, Bob Brauchler, Margaret Johnson, Bob Hodapp, Ruth Schaefer, and Scott Henderson.



Schools Equity and Education Visits Capitol

Representatives from Schools Equity and Education in Albany and Melville visited with Sen. Westrom to discuss legislative concerns.

Legislative Update

Protecting at risk children – On Thursday, the Minnesota Senate heard House File 8, which fast tracks two of the key recommendations from the Governor’s Task Force on the Protection of Children.

The bill contains two key provisions. First, it repeals a law passed last year that prohibits the use of screened-out maltreatment reports by caseworkers. Second, it clarifies that the health and safety of children are the number one consideration when reports of neglect and maltreatment are received. This is a change from current law, which focuses on engaging the family’s capabilities.

This important bill will allow caseworkers to form a more complete picture and consider all important information when making decisions. Our child protection laws should focus on the health and safety of the child above all else. My heart breaks for the innocent victims who were not protected by the system in the past, such as in the case of Eric Dean, but these changes are a good step toward preventing tragedies in the future.

Reinforcing our children’s safety and privacy at school – On Monday, Senate Republicans introduced the “Student Safety and Physical Privacy Act” to address serious concerns regarding a controversial new policy from the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL). Last December, the MSHSL issued a new ruling allowing transgender students to play on a sports team other than the team of the student’s biological sex. In effect, it allows male students who identify as female to play on girls sports teams.

The ruling was met with resistance from parents and families who were worried about what effect it would have on locker room and shower situations, and how the ruling would impact private and nonpublic schools. Before the final vote on the policy, the MSHSL was presented with a petition of 6,000 names opposing the changes, but the Board proceeded to adopt the plan anyway. In addition to parent apprehension, the ruling also appears to be in conflict with state statutes.

The “Student Safety and Physical Privacy Act,” which Sen. Westrom co-authored and has been assigned Senate File 1543, clarifies state law and sends a message to parents that we are listening to their concerns. It is a commonsense bill that protects students’ basic safety and privacy rights by codifying what high schools are already doing. It simply defines who is eligible to participate on school sports teams and requires that schools maintain facilities like bathrooms and locker rooms that are separated based on biological sex. Schools will be able to continue to meet the needs of individual students who are uncomfortable using the facility that corresponds with their biological sex by offering access to a private facility.

I support this bill because it is clear Minnesota families are unhappy with the Board’s decision. A recent statewide poll from Public Opinion Strategies showed only 29 percent of respondents supported the MSHSL ruling, while 76 percent support the changes in our bill. As a father, I share your concerns about the policy.

Tom Anderson Elected to U of M Board of Regents Seat – On Wednesday, March 4, 2015, the Minnesota State Senate and Minnesota State House of Representatives held a joint convention to elect

five candidates to the Board of Regents at the University of Minnesota. Among the selected candidates was Thomas J. Anderson of Alexandria, who was recommended for the 7th Congressional District seat.

“The Board of Regents selection this year was extremely competitive,” said State Senator Torrey Westrom (R – Elbow Lake). “Each of the candidates exhibited a high level of excellence. Anderson’s extensive background in business and commitment to higher education made him an ideal candidate. I was pleased that he was elected to fill one of the five open seats on the Board of Regents.”

“I am confident that with his skills and abilities, Tom Anderson will continue to make a meaningful impact on our community,” continued Sen. Westrom. “The Minnesota State Legislature was truly fortunate to have his participation. I wish him all the best of luck in his future endeavors.”

Anderson graduated from the University of Minnesota and continues to be an active member of the community. He is a business entrepreneur and owned Anderson Funeral Home of Alexandria for 33 years, as well as served as Chairman of the Board for Knute Nelson.

2016 LCCMR Request for Proposal Deadline – This is just a reminder that the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources’ (LCCMR) 2016 Request for Proposal (RFP) for funding from Minnesota’s Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) beginning July 1, 2016 is currently **open until May 11, 2015**. I encourage you to share this information with any organizations or individuals that may have a relevant project idea.

Anyone with a project idea consistent with the RFP may submit a proposal for consideration by the LCCMR. LCCMR staff are available to assist proposers, answer questions, or review and provide feedback on drafts of proposals and drafts are currently being accepted for review. Proposers are strongly encouraged to submit proposal drafts to help ensure proposals are focused, clear, and contain all necessary information. Drafts must be received no later than Friday, May 1, 2015 to allow adequate time for staff to review. Although, as historically many proposers wait until the deadline to submit drafts, earlier submission is encouraged to enable staff to provide the highest quality feedback and review.

During Summer/Fall 2015, the LCCMR will be considering all proposals received in response to the 2016 RFP and selecting projects to recommend to the 2016 Minnesota Legislature. Project funding does not become available until July 1, 2016.

Approximately \$46.3 million is expected to be available for projects being sought that provide multiple ecological and other public benefits in at least one of the following seven environment and natural resource areas further detailed in the RFP:

1. Foundational Natural Resource Data and Information
2. Water Resources
3. Environmental Education
4. Aquatic and Terrestrial Invasive Species
5. Air Quality, Climate Change, and Renewable Energy
6. Methods to Protect or Restore Land, Water, and Habitat
7. Land Acquisition for Habitat and Recreation

For additional information pertaining to the LCCMR's proposal and funding process, please see the visit <http://www.lccmr.leg.mn>

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As always, please contact Senator Torrey Westrom by phone at 651-296-3826 or toll free at 855-407-7386, by email at sen.torrey.westrom@senate.mn, or by mail at 107 State Office Building, 100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd, St. Paul, MN 55155.