

Union Avoidance Is Not A Democratic Value

To our supporters and ranked choice voting supporters across our state and country,

We want to share an update on our unionization efforts at FairVote Minnesota. We wish we had happier news to share. Our unionization efforts were not unlike similar movements of nonprofit and campaign workers locally and nationally. We were seeking basic respect and dignity in the workplace.

Though initially agreeing to voluntary recognition of our union, in our view, FairVote Minnesota management began immediately engaging in union avoidance strategies. Executive Director, Jeanne Massey, and Deputy Director, Liz Johnson, did not speak to field team workers about our union in any meaningful way, insisting they needed the Board of Directors and an attorney to speak. FairVote Minnesota retained the services of Mark Mathison. Mark Mathison states on his website “**He has substantial experience working with employers on traditional labor law matters such as union avoidance strategies...**”¹ This was a harbinger of things to come.

Two hours into our first day at the bargaining table management announced their intention to lay off the entire Field Team. **Let’s be clear: unions are people. Without workers in the bargaining unit there is no true embrace of our union at FairVote Minnesota.** We were shocked and saddened by their actions. Actions that we find fundamentally at odds with the mission of FairVote Minnesota.

We stuck to the bargaining table despite our layoffs because it was important to us to protect any field workers that FairVote Minnesota should hire in the future. As a result of our efforts a CBA was signed on July 16, 2021. We expect FairVote Minnesota will argue the fact they have a CBA is evidence enough that they support labor. **Ask them how many bargaining unit employees they have and what happened to the five staff that sparked unionization.**

We also expect FairVote Minnesota ostensibly will claim our layoffs were the result of a “typical” lack of funds towards the “end” of a campaign cycle. We find this hard to square with the news that FairVote Minnesota has the resources to be one of the top lobbying organizations in the state², and to our knowledge has chosen to retain lobbyists and consultants on the payroll over the critical boots-on-the-ground work of the field team.³

Moreover, with five cities using RCV in Minnesota this fall, it would have been more important now than ever before for a robust field team to talk to voters about their ballots. Following our layoffs, the organization relies on UNPAID summer interns. **We cannot overstate the extent to which we believe the actions of FairVote Minnesota negatively impacts the progress of Ranked Choice Voting in Minnesota.**

Our work, which fought for the use of ranked choice voting in elections statewide, enjoyed the support of a number of prominent elected officials and other state opinion leaders. It is yet to be seen how this development may impact the number of people who continue to endorse this now tainted effort.

As former staff, we proudly spoke out and organized on behalf of ranked choice voting. We still believe in RCV as an important reform to our electoral process. But, with the way we were treated as staff we wonder about FairVote Minnesota's ability to effectively lead sustained campaigns for progressive democratic change. **Advancing democratic values means uplifting voices of folks all over our state, and in our view FairVote Minnesota was unwilling to allow their own workers, the field team, to have a voice in the workplace.**

If you feel called to act, please contact FairVote Minnesota at info@fairvotemn.org or sign our letter of support [here](#). Let FairVote Minnesota leadership know that you are disappointed in the actions of FairVote Minnesota in laying off the entire bargaining unit and will not support organizations that engage in union avoidance.

-Former FVMN Union

¹Attorney Mark Mathison, hired by FairVote Minnesota. His profile states he has experience in union avoidance strategies <https://www.lathropgpm.com/Mark-Mathison>

²Campaign Finance Board Disclosures show FairVote Minnesota Foundation spent \$700,000 on lobbying in 2020 and \$420,000 on lobbying in 2019 <https://cfb.mn.gov/reports-and-data/viewers/lobbying/lobbying-organizations/6255/2021.2/> this significant increase in lobbying expenditures was despite taking two draws of federal PPP loans in 2020 and early 2021 <https://projects.propublica.org/coronavirus/bailouts/search?q=fairvote+minnesota+foundation>

³Picture of FairVote Minnesota Executive Director Jeanne Massey celebrating the legislative session with lobbyists, two days after announcing layoffs of unionizing field team workers <https://twitter.com/jkmassey/status/1403184788111073283>