

STATE OF MINNESOTA

DISTRICT COURT

COUNTY OF RAMSEY

SECOND JUDICIAL DISTRICT

Case Type: Civil

Robert LaRose, Teresa Maples, Mary Sansom,
Gary Severson, and Minnesota Alliance for
Retired Americans,

Plaintiffs,

v.

Steve Simon, in his official capacity as Minnesota
Secretary of State,

Defendant.

**STIPULATION AND PARTIAL
CONSENT DECREE**

Court File No: 62-CV-20-3149

Plaintiffs Robert LaRose, Teresa Maples, Mary Sansom, Gary Severson, and Minnesota Alliance for Retired Americans, and Defendant Steve Simon (collectively, “the Parties”) stipulate to the following and request that this Court approve this Partial Consent Decree. This Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree is limited only to Plaintiffs’ claims as they pertain to the August 11, 2020 primary election (“August Primary”) and is premised upon the current public health crisis facing Minnesota caused by the ongoing spread of the novel coronavirus.

**I.
RECITALS**

WHEREAS on May 13, 2020, Plaintiffs filed a complaint against Defendant challenging the constitutionality and enforcement of Minnesota’s requirement that each mail-in ballot be witnessed by a registered Minnesota voter, a notary, or person otherwise authorized to administer oaths (“Witness Requirement”), Minn. Stat. §§ 203B.07, 204B.45, and 204B.46, and its requirement that ballots be received by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day if delivered by mail (the

“Election Day Receipt Deadline”), *id.* §§ 203B.08 subd. 3; 204B.45, and 204B.46, Minn. R. 8210.2200 subp. 1 and 8210.3000 (collectively, “Challenged Provisions”), in general and specifically during the ongoing public health crisis caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus;

WHEREAS among other relief requested, the Complaint seeks to enjoin enforcement of the Challenged Provisions during the August Primary due, in part, to the public health crisis caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus;

WHEREAS the coronavirus public health crisis is ongoing and Minnesota remains under “Stay Safe” Emergency Executive Order 20-74, which contemplates a phased reopening of Minnesota that continues to require social distancing and mandates that “[i]ndividuals engaging in activities outside of the home follow the requirements of [the Stay Safe Order and Minnesota Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”)] Guidelines,” Exec. Order 20-74 ¶ 6(a), and states that individuals “at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 . . . [are] strongly urged to stay at home or in their place of residence,” *id.* ¶4;

WHEREAS Minnesota is anticipated to be required to maintain social distancing and abide by CDC Guidelines until the crisis subsides;

WHEREAS current projections indicate that the coronavirus crisis will continue into the summer and well into the August Primary election cycle;

WHEREAS federal guidelines state “[e]veryone should avoid close contact” by “stay[ing] home as much as possible” and “put[ting] distance between yourself and other people,” CDC, Coronavirus Disease 2019: How to Protect Yourself & Others, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html> (last visited May 18, 2020), and “[e]ncourage voters to use voting methods that minimize direct contact,”

including absentee voting, CDC, Recommendations for Election Polling Locations: Interim guidance to prevent spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/election-polling-locations.html> (last visited May 18, 2020);

WHEREAS the absentee voting period for the August Primary election begins on June 26, 2020, 46 days prior to the date of the election, Minn. Stat. § 203B.081 subd.1; *id.* § 204B.35, and absentee instructions, ballots, and envelopes, including the certificate of eligibility, must be prepared in time to have a supply for every precinct available to cover absentee voting prior to that date;

WHEREAS available public data regarding transmission of COVID-19 supports Plaintiffs' concerns for their safety if they are required to interact with others to cast their ballot in the August Primary, and whereas anticipated increases in absentee balloting, coupled with corresponding shortages of elections personnel and mail delays, appear likely to impact the August Primary and threaten to slow down the process of mailing and returning absentee ballots;

WHEREAS, on April 28, 2020, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services reported that 52 people who voted in person or worked the polls for Wisconsin's April 7, 2020 primary election have tested positive for COVID-19 thus far;

WHEREAS courts in other states have enjoined those states from enforcing witness requirements, similar to Minnesota's witness requirement, for primary elections this spring. *See Thomas v. Andino*, -- F. Supp. 3d. --, 2020 WL 2617329 (D.S.C. May 25, 2020); *League of Women Voters of Virginia v. Virginia State Board of Elections*, -- F. Supp. 3d --, 2020 WL 2158249 (W.D. Va. May 5, 2020);

WHEREAS, for the April 7, 2020 primary election in Wisconsin, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the implementation of a postmark rule, whereby ballots postmarked by Election Day could be counted as long as they were received within six days of Election Day. *Republican Nat'l Comm. v. Democratic Nat'l Comm.*, 140 S. Ct. 1205, 1207 (2020);

WHEREAS the Parties agree that an expeditious resolution of this matter for the August Primary, in the manner contemplated by the terms of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, will limit confusion and increase certainty surrounding the August Primary, including in the nine days remaining before the June 26, 2020 deadline for absentee ballot preparation, and is in the best interests of the health, safety, and constitutional rights of the citizens of Minnesota, and, therefore, in the public interest;

WHEREAS the Parties wish to avoid the burden and expense of litigation over an expedited preliminary injunction for the August Primary in agreeing to these terms, the Parties, acting by and through their counsel, have engaged in arms' length negotiations, and both Parties are represented by counsel knowledgeable in this area of the law;

WHEREAS it is the finding of this Court, made on the pleadings and upon agreement of the Parties, that: (i) the requirements of the Minnesota Constitution, Art. I, §§ 2, 7, and Art. VII, § 1, and U.S. Constitution, Amend. I and XIV, will be carried out by the implementation of this Partial Consent Decree, (ii) the terms of this Partial Consent Decree constitute a fair and equitable settlement of the issues raised with respect to the August Primary, (iii) this Partial Consent Decree is intended to and does resolve Plaintiffs' claims with respect to the August Primary; and (iv) this Partial Consent Decree is not intended to and does not resolve Plaintiffs' claims generally or specifically with respect to the general election scheduled for November 3, 2020 or any election thereafter;

NOW, THEREFORE, upon consent of the Parties, in consideration of the mutual promises and recitals contained in this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, including relinquishment of certain legal rights, the Parties agree as follows:

II. JURISDICTION

This Court has jurisdiction over the subject matter of this action pursuant to Minn. Const. Art. VI, § 3 and Minn. Stat. § 484.01 and has jurisdiction over the Parties herein. The Court shall retain jurisdiction of this Stipulation and Consent Decree for the duration of the term of this Partial Consent Decree for purposes of entering all orders, judgments, and decrees that may be necessary to implement and enforce compliance with the terms provided herein.

III. PARTIES

This Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree applies to and is binding upon the following parties:

- A. The State of Minnesota by Steve Simon, Secretary of State of Minnesota; and
- B. All Plaintiffs.

IV. SCOPE OF CONSENT DECREE

A. This Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree constitutes a partial settlement and resolution of Plaintiffs' claims against Defendant pending in this Lawsuit. Plaintiffs recognize that by signing this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, they are releasing any claims under the Minnesota or U.S. Constitutions that they might have against Defendant with respect to the Witness Requirement and Election Day Receipt Deadline in the August Primary. Plaintiffs' release of claims will become final upon the effective date of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree.

B. The Parties to this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree acknowledge that this does not resolve or purport to resolve any claims pertaining to the constitutionality or enforcement of the Witness Requirement and Election Day Receipt Deadline during the November 3, 2020 general election or any election thereafter. Neither Party releases any claims or defenses with respect to the Witness Requirement and Election Day Receipt Deadline related to the November 3, 2020 general election or any election thereafter.

C. The Parties to this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree further acknowledge that by signing this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, the Parties do not release or waive the following: (i) any rights, claims, or defenses that are based on any events that occur after they sign this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, (ii) any claims or defenses that are unrelated to the allegations filed by Plaintiffs in this Lawsuit, and (iii) any right to institute legal action for the purpose of enforcing this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree or defenses thereto.

D. By entering this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, Plaintiffs are partially settling a disputed matter between themselves and Defendant. The Parties are entering this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree for the purpose of resolving a disputed claim, avoiding the burdens and costs associated with the costs of a preliminary injunction motion and hearing, and ensuring both safety and certainty in advance of the August Primary. Nothing in this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree constitutes an admission by any party of liability or wrongdoing. The Parties acknowledge that a court may seek to consider this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, including the violations alleged in Plaintiffs' Complaint, in a future proceeding distinct from this Lawsuit.

V.
CONSENT DECREE OBJECTIVES

In addition to partially settling the claims of the Parties, the objective of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree is to ensure that Minnesota voters can safely and constitutionally exercise the franchise in the August Primary.

**VI.
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED, ADJUDGED, AND DECREED FOR THE REASONS
STATED ABOVE THAT:**

A. For the August Primary Defendant shall not enforce the Witness Requirement, with respect to voting only, as set out in Minn. Stat. § 203B.07, subd. 3 (1) and (2), that each absentee ballot and designated mail ballot, Minn. Stat. § 204B.45 - .46, and Minn. R. 8210.3000, for voters previously registered in Minnesota be witnessed by a registered Minnesota voter, a notary, or person otherwise authorized to administer oaths.

B. For the August Primary Defendant shall not enforce the Election Day Receipt Deadline for mail-in ballots, as set out in Minn. Stat. §§ 203B.08 subd. 3, 204B.45, and 204B.46 and Minn. R. 8210.2200 subp. 1, and 8210.3000, that ballots be received by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day if delivered by mail. Instead, the deadline set forth in paragraph VI.D below shall govern.

C. Defendant shall issue guidance instructing all relevant local election officials to count all absentee and designated mail ballots in the August Primary that are otherwise validly cast by voters registered in Minnesota prior to casting their absentee and designated mail ballot but missing a witness signature.

D. Defendant shall issue guidance instructing all relevant local election officials to count all mail-in ballots in the August Primary that are otherwise validly cast and postmarked on or before Election Day but received by close of business at least one day prior to the beginning

of the county canvass (i.e., within 2 days of Election Day for the August Primary). For the purposes of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, postmark shall refer to any type of imprint applied by the United States Postal Service to indicate the location and date the Postal Service accepts custody of a piece of mail, including bar codes, circular stamps, or other tracking marks. Where a ballot does not bear a postmark date, the election official reviewing the ballot should presume that it was mailed on or before Election Day unless the preponderance of the evidence demonstrates it was mailed after Election Day.

E. Defendant shall issue instructions to include with all absentee ballots and designated mail ballots—or issue guidance instructing all relevant local election officials to modify, amend, or print the instructions accompanying each absentee ballot and designated mail ballot—to inform voters that any absentee ballot or designated mail ballot cast by a previously registered voter in the August Primary without a witness signature will not be rejected on that basis and that the witness signature line and associated language for witnesses to certify a previously registered voter’s ballot, Minn. Stat. §§ 203B.07, subd. 3 (1) and (2), 204B.45, and 204B.46, and Minn. R. 8210.2200, subp.1 and Minn. R. 8210.3000 and be removed from the certification of eligibility altogether for absentee ballot and designated mail ballot materials sent to previously registered voters.

F. Defendant shall issue instructions to include with all absentee and designated mail ballots—or issue guidance instructing all relevant local election officials to modify, amend, or print instructions accompanying each absentee and designated mail ballot—to inform voters that any absentee or designated mail ballot cast in the August Primary and postmarked on or before Election Day and received within 2 days will be counted.

G. Defendant shall take additional reasonable steps to inform the public that the Witness Requirement for voting will not be enforced for the August Primary and issue guidance instructing all relevant city and county election officials to do the same.

H. Defendant shall take additional reasonable steps to inform the public that the Election Day Receipt Deadline will not be enforced for the August Primary and that any absentee or designated mail ballot cast in the August Primary and postmarked on or before Election Day and received within 2 days by close of business will be counted.

I. Plaintiffs will not file a motion for preliminary injunction for the August Primary election.

J. In accordance with the terms of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, the Parties shall each bear their own fees, expenses, and costs incurred as of the date of this Order with respect to Plaintiffs' claims raised as to the August Primary against Defendant.

VII. ENFORCEMENT AND RESERVATION OF REMEDIES

The Parties to this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree may request relief from this Court if issues arise concerning the interpretation of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree that cannot be resolved through the process described below. This Court specifically retains continuing jurisdiction over the subject matter hereof and the Parties hereto for the purposes of interpreting, enforcing, or modifying the terms of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, or for granting any other relief not inconsistent with the terms of this Partial Consent Decree, until this Partial Consent Decree is terminated. The Parties may apply to this Court for any orders or other relief necessary to construe or effectuate this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree or seek informal conferences for direction as may be appropriate. The Parties shall attempt to meet and confer regarding any dispute prior to seeking relief from the Court.

If either Party believes that the other has not complied with the requirements of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, it shall notify the other Party of its noncompliance by emailing the Party's counsel. Notice shall be given at least one business day prior to initiating any action or filing any motion with the Court.

The Parties specifically reserve their right to seek recovery of their litigation costs and expenses arising from any violation of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree that requires either Party to file a motion with this Court for enforcement of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree.

VIII. GENERAL TERMS

A. Voluntary Agreement. The Parties acknowledge that no person has exerted undue pressure on them to sign this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree. Each Party is voluntarily choosing to enter into this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree because of the benefits that are provided under the agreement. The Parties acknowledge that they have read and understand the terms of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree; they have been represented by legal counsel or had the opportunity to obtain legal counsel; and they are voluntarily entering into this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree to resolve the dispute among them.

B. Severability. The provisions of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree shall be severable, and should any provisions be declared by a court of competent jurisdiction to be unenforceable, the remaining provisions of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree shall remain in full force and effect.

C. Agreement. This Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree is binding. The Parties acknowledge that they have been advised that (i) the other Party has no duty to protect their interest or provide them with information about their legal rights, (ii) signing this Stipulation and

Partial Consent Decree may adversely affect their legal rights, and (iii) they should consult an attorney before signing this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree if they are uncertain of their rights.

D. Entire Agreement. This Stipulation and Consent Decree constitutes the entire agreement between the Parties relating to the constitutionality and enforcement of the Witness Requirement and Election Day Receipt Deadline as they pertain to the August Primary. No Party has relied upon any statements, promises, or representations that are not stated in this document. No changes to this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree are valid unless they are in writing, identified as an amendment to this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree, and signed by all Parties. There are no inducements or representations leading to the execution of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree except as herein explicitly contained.

E. Warranty. The persons signing this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree warrant that they have full authority to enter this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree on behalf of the Party each represents, and that this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree is valid and enforceable as to that Party.

F. Counterparts. This Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree may be executed in multiple counterparts, which shall be construed together as if one instrument. Any Party shall be entitled to rely on an electronic or facsimile copy of a signature as if it were an original.

G. Effective Date. This Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree is effective upon the date it is entered by the Court. Defendant agrees to continue to initiate and implement all activities necessary to comply with the provisions of this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree pending entry by the Court.

IX. TERMINATION

This Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree shall remain in effect through the certification of ballots for the August Primary. The Court shall retain jurisdiction to enforce the terms of the Partial Consent Decree for the duration of this Partial Consent Decree. This Court's jurisdiction over this Stipulation and Partial Consent Decree shall automatically terminate after the certification of all ballots for the August Primary.

THE PARTIES ENTER INTO AND APPROVE THIS STIPULATION AND PARTIAL CONSENT DECREE AND SUBMIT IT TO THE COURT SO THAT IT MAY BE APPROVED AND ENTERED. THE PARTIES HAVE CAUSED THIS STIPULATION AND CONSENT DECREE TO BE SIGNED ON THE DATES OPPOSITE THEIR SIGNATURES.

Dated: June 16, 2020**SECRETARY OF STATE OF MINNESOTA**By: Steve Simon
Steve Simon
Secretary of State**GREENE ESPEL PLLP**Dated: June 16, 2020By: /s/Sybil L. Dunlop
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*Motions for admission pro hac vice pending

Attorneys for Plaintiffs

IT IS SO DECREED AND ORDERED. JUDGMENT SHALL BE ENTERED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FOREGOING CONSENT DECREE.

Dated: June 17, 2020

The Honorable Judge Sara Grewing
Judge of District Court