

Sixty-third
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

HOUSE BILL NO. 1193

Introduced by

Representatives N. Johnson, Kretschmar, Glassheim

Senators Lyson, Sorvaag, Murphy

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 44-11 of the North Dakota
2 Century Code, relating to appointment of a special commissioner to preside over removal
3 proceedings; to amend and reenact sections 44-11-01, 44-11-02, 44-11-03, 44-11-04, 44-11-06,
4 44-11-07, 44-11-09, 44-11-10, 44-11-11, and 44-11-12 of the North Dakota Century Code,
5 relating to proceedings to remove officials from office; and to repeal sections 44-11-05,
6 44-11-13, and 44-11-14 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to taking of testimony,
7 appeals, and assessment of costs on removal proceedings.

8 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

9 **SECTION 1. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-11-01 of the North Dakota Century Code is
10 amended and reenacted as follows:

11 **44-11-01. What officers removable by governor - Grounds.**

12 The governor may remove from office any county commissioner, sheriff, coroner, county
13 auditor, recorder, state's attorney, county treasurer, superintendent of schools, county
14 commissioner, surveyor, public administrator, city auditor, city commissioner, mayor, ~~chief of~~
15 ~~police, deputy sheriff, or other police officer,~~ township officer, rural fire protection district board
16 member, school board member, or any custodian of public moneys, except the state treasurer,
17 whenever it appears to the governor by ~~competent~~ preponderance of the evidence and after a
18 hearing as provided in this chapter, that the officer has been guilty of misconduct, malfeasance,
19 crime in office, neglect of duty in office, or of habitual ~~drunkenness~~ substance abuse or gross
20 incompetency.

21 **SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-11-02 of the North Dakota Century Code is
22 amended and reenacted as follows:

1 **44-11-02. Charges - How made - By whom prosecuted.**

2 1. ~~The complaint or charges~~petition against any official authorized to be removed by the
3 governor must be entitled in the name of this state and must be filed with the
4 ~~governor~~attorney general.

5 2. ~~The complaint or charges~~ against any official, other than a school board member, may
6 be made upon the ~~relation~~petition of fifty qualified electors of the county in which the
7 person charged is an officer, or upon the ~~relation~~petition of ten percent of the qualified
8 electors voting at the preceding general election for the office of governor in that
9 political subdivision or district in which the person charged is an officer, whichever is
10 least, or by the state's attorney of such county.

11 3. ~~The complaint or charges~~ against a school board member must be made upon the-
12 ~~relation of a petition~~ containing the signatures of qualified electors of the school district
13 equal in number to twenty percent of the number of persons enumerated in the school
14 census for that district for the most recent year such census was taken, unless such
15 census is greater than four thousand in which case only fifteen percent of the number
16 of persons enumerated in the school census are required. However, not fewer than
17 twenty-five signatures are required unless the district has fewer than twenty-five
18 qualified electors, in which case the petition must be signed by not less than
19 twenty-five percent of the qualified electors of the district. In those districts with fewer
20 than twenty-five qualified electors, the number of qualified electors in the district must
21 be determined by the county superintendent for such county in which such school is
22 located.

23 4. ~~The complaint and charges must be filed by the attorney general when directed to do~~
24 ~~so by the governor.~~When the petition is filed, the attorney general shall conduct an
25 investigation within thirty days. Upon completion of the investigation, the attorney
26 general shall make a recommendation to the governor whether a removal proceeding
27 should be conducted by a special commissioner, and if so, whether the accused officer
28 should be suspended during the pendency of the proceeding.

29 5. Upon receipt of the recommendation of the attorney general, the governor shall
30 determine whether to proceed with the appointment of a special commissioner. If the
31 governor decides not to appoint a special commissioner, the governor shall notify the

individuals who filed the petition and summarize the reasons for the decision. If the governor decides to appoint a special commissioner, the governor shall request that a prosecutor draft and serve the official complaint against the officer.

5. a. When the officer sought to be removed is other than the state's attorney, the state's attorney or other competent attorney, upon request of the governor, shall appear and prosecute.

b. When the proceedings are brought to remove the state's attorney, the governor shall request the attorney general or other competent attorney to appear on behalf of the state and prosecute such proceedings.

SECTION 3. AMENDMENT. Section 44-11-03 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

44-11-03. Petition and Complaint - Requisites.

The petition and thereafter the complaint or charges must state the charges against the accused, and, unless filed by the state's attorney or attorney general, must be verified and may be amended as in ordinary actions. If such amendment of the complaint or charges includes any new or additional charge, then a reasonable time the accused must be allowed the accused a reasonable time to prepare a defense thereto.

SECTION 4. AMENDMENT. Section 44-11-04 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

**~~44-11-04. Special commissioner to hear and take testimony - Suspension of officer -~~
Notice to governing body.**

~~Whenever charges are filed against any officer mentioned in section 44-11-01, the governor shall appoint as a special commissioner a competent person learned in the law to hear and report the testimony for and against the accused and to file that person's report of the testimony, to be used on the hearing. The testimony must be reduced to writing, and when the testimony is not taken by a shorthand reporter, each witness shall subscribe the witness's name to the witness's testimony when the same is so reduced. If the governor judges that the best interests of the state require it to be done, the governor by written order to be delivered to such officer, may suspend the accused officer from the performance of duty during the pendency of the hearing removal proceedings. If the governor suspends the accused, the governor immediately shall notify the board or persons authorized to fill a vacancy in that office, and that board or~~

those persons, within five days after receipt of such notice, shall appoint a competent person to fill the office and perform the duties thereof ~~ad interim~~ of the officer during the suspension.

SECTION 5. A new section to chapter 44-11 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted as follows:

Appointment of special commissioner - Filing of complaint.

The governor shall appoint as a special commissioner a retired or former judge, or other competent person learned in the law to preside over the removal proceedings. The prosecutor shall file with the special commissioner a complaint containing the allegations against the officer, which may consist of the charges alleged in the petition or any charge justified by the investigation conducted by the attorney general. The prosecutor shall also file proof that the complaint was served on the officer.

SECTION 6. AMENDMENT. Section 44-11-06 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

44-11-06. Hearing - Report to governor - Time of hearing fixed.

~~Whenever testimony has been taken upon charges filed against any officer, as provided by this chapter, the special commissioner forthwith shall report all such testimony and proceedings to the governor and shall file the same in the governor's office. Thereupon the governor shall fix a time and place for the hearing on a day not more than ten days from the date of the filing of the commissioner's report, and not less than five days from the date of the service of notice of such hearing upon the accused. At such hearing the accused is entitled to be heard in person or by attorney.~~ Within thirty days of the appointment of the special commissioner, a hearing shall be held in open court on the allegations of the complaint. The proceedings shall be recorded by a court reporter or court recorder. The accused is entitled to be present and be heard in person or through the accused's attorney. The commissioner has the same powers as are conferred upon district judges to take testimony and may rule on, admit, or exclude testimony accordingly. Within ten days of the conclusion of the hearing, the commissioner shall forward to the governor a report of the proceedings, including a summary of testimony, findings as to whether any allegations were proven by a preponderance of the evidence, exhibits and evidence received, and a recommendation whether the accused should be removed from office. The governor may request a transcript be prepared if review of testimony is necessary for a final determination on removal.

1 **SECTION 7. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-11-07 of the North Dakota Century Code is
2 amended and reenacted as follows:

3 **44-11-07. Removal from office upon hearing - Filling vacancy.**

4 If ~~upon a hearing the charges are sustained~~after reviewing the report and recommendation,
5 ~~the governor determines that removal is in the best interests of the state,~~ the governor ~~forthwith~~
6 shall make an order in writing removing the accused officer from office, and shall cause a copy
7 of the order to be delivered to the accused and one copy to be delivered to the board or
8 persons having the authority to fill a vacancy in that office. Thereupon that board or person,
9 within five days thereafter, shall appoint a competent person to fill the office and perform the
10 duties thereof, unless the accused, prior to the final hearing, had been suspended as provided
11 by this chapter, and an ad interim appointment made. In such case the person appointed to the
12 office ~~ad interim~~during the suspension shall continue until the expiration of the term for which
13 the accused was elected or appointed. If the governor decides that removal is not in the best
14 interests of the state, the governor shall notify the individuals who filed the petition and
15 summarize the reasons for the decision.

16 **SECTION 8. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-11-09 of the North Dakota Century Code is
17 amended and reenacted as follows:

18 **44-11-09. Appeal - Notification of governor - Proceedings.**

19 The clerk of the district court shall notify the governor of the filing of an appeal by registered
20 or certified mail. The governor, within ten days after the receipt of such notice, shall mail to the
21 clerk of said court the testimony in such removal proceedings, together with a copy of any order
22 made by the governor in such proceedings. Said appeal must be heard by the judge of said
23 court upon the record in such proceedings, without a jury, at the next regular term of court or
24 prior to said term, in the discretion of the judge of said court. After such hearing by the district
25 judge, the district judge shall make an order affirming the order of the governor or an order
26 reinstating the defendant officer if the decision is clearly erroneous.

27 **SECTION 9. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-11-10 of the North Dakota Century Code is
28 amended and reenacted as follows:

29 **44-11-10. Fees of special commissioner - Stenographer - Witnesses.**

30 The fees of the special commissioner provided for by this chapter must be ~~one~~two hundred
31 dollars per day, and in addition thereto, the special commissioner shall receive mileage from the

1 commissioner's residence to the place of trial the same as is allowed by law to sheriffs. The
2 special commissioner may employ a stenographer and pay the expenses of the stenographer.
3 Such expenses must be itemized by the commissioner and filed with the commissioner's report
4 and findings and audited and allowed by the governor. Witnesses giving testimony before such
5 commissioner, the number to be limited by the commissioner, must be allowed the same fees
6 as witnesses in district court. In proceedings to remove a county officer, such fees must be paid
7 by the county upon allowance by the board of county commissioners in the same manner as
8 other claims against the county, and if a municipal or township officer, then by the city council,
9 board of city commissioners, or board of township supervisors, in the same manner as other
10 claims against the municipality are paid.

11 **SECTION 10. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-11-11 of the North Dakota Century Code is
12 amended and reenacted as follows:

13 **44-11-11. Oath of commissioner - Contents - Filing.**

14 When a special commissioner has been appointed as provided in this chapter, the
15 commissioner forthwith shall take an oath and shall file the same with the governor that:

- 16 1. The commissioner, impartially and to the best of the commissioner's knowledge and
17 ability, without fear, favor, or prejudice, will hear and cause to be taken all the
18 testimony and evidence offered and received at the hearing for and in behalf of the
19 prosecution and accused, together with all papers and other exhibits offered by either
20 party, and carefully will preserve the same.
- 21 2. The commissioner will cause all of the oral testimony offered and received at the
22 hearing to be ~~correctly and fully~~ available to be transcribed at the request of the
23 governor, and as speedily as may be after the hearing will ~~attest the same as a full,~~
24 ~~true~~ prepare a report of the proceedings, summary of testimony, findings of fact, and
25 complete record of all evidence and testimony, including all exhibits offered and
26 received at said hearing by either party, and will cause the same to be filed with the
27 governor.

28 **SECTION 11. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-11-12 of the North Dakota Century Code is
29 amended and reenacted as follows:

1 **44-11-12. Powers of commissioner - Subpoenas - Service - Fees.**

2 After taking and filing the oath of office, the commissioner has authority to issue subpoenas
3 for persons and subpoenas duces tecum and to administer oaths to witnesses the same as is
4 conferred upon district judges. The subpoenas may be directed to any sheriff, or chief of police,
5 who immediately shall serve the subpoenas. The officer is entitled to such fees as are allowed
6 to sheriffs for serving subpoenas in district court. The fees must be paid in the same manner as
7 is provided in this chapter for witness fees and commissioner's fees. ~~The commissioner has the~~
8 ~~same powers as are conferred upon district judges to take testimony and may rule on, admit, or~~
9 ~~exclude testimony accordingly.~~ The commissioner may punish for contempt in the same manner
10 as the district court.

11 **SECTION 12. REPEAL.** Sections 44-11-05, 44-11-13, and 44-11-14 of the North Dakota
12 Century Code are repealed.