

Written Testimony for the
House GVA

January 28, 2021

Donnell Preskey, NDACo



RE: Opposition to HB 1173

Greetings, Chairman Kasper, and members of the Committee. My name is Donnell Preskey with the North Dakota Association of Counties. One of my roles at NDACo is serving as the executive director for the ND County Auditors Association.

We understand the intent of this bill and fully agree that voters should be educated and well informed on the material presented on the ballot. However, our county auditors wonder if printing the measures in full on the ballot is the best way to accomplish this. Printing the measures in full can and will lead to substantial and significant issues when it comes to executing an election.

Space on a ballot is limited due to size restrictions the tabulating equipment can handle. The current tabulation equipment can scan ballots 8.5 inches wide and up to 19 inches in length. While this may seem like a sizeable area, there are restrictions for the amount of text that can be placed in a singular column. In addition, space is further restricted due to header and footer information, required by law, as well as border space for the tabulators to correctly scan each ballot.

If the information can not fit on a one-page, double-sided ballot, the only option is to have a two-page, double-sided ballot. Having a two-page ballot opens up a myriad of issues.

- Voters will forget there's an additional page or skip over other information on the ballot due to the length.
- If it is a two page ballot - scanning one page versus two pages will create discrepancies with the number of voters checked-in and quantity of ballots scanned into the tabulator. Having these discrepancies in the count will lead to increased voter distrust and election integrity concerns.

- Having a two-page ballot will also lead to early vote and Election Day problems. The dedicated election workers who are at the polls will have more to manage with a two-page ballot. This could lead to increased wait times at the polls as well as balancing issues when the polls close, all of which will lead to a delay in reporting the election results.
- Counties are responsible for ballot costs. (\$.30 per ballot) Two-page ballots would double election costs.

The key is really voter education. Many states across the nation send voter information packets to their electorate. These packets are mailed from the Secretary of State prior to absentee ballots being mailed. These information packets can be as robust or lean as desired for the ballot measure information.

Voter education is on the priority list of many Auditors throughout North Dakota. We agree that transparency and communication is key when executing successful elections. However, there are great alternatives established by other states that could be adopted that would increase voter education while at the same time maintaining the current one-page two-sided ballot. This will allow us to confidently uphold the integrity of North Dakota Elections.

We want to note that HB 1173 and HB 1119 are very similar and we ask you give both bills a Do Not Pass recommendation.