

Testimony Prepared for the  
**House GVA**  
March 19, 2021  
Donnell Preskey, NDACo



**RE: Supportive Testimony for SB 2142: Process Days for Ballots**

Chair Kasper and committee members, I'm Donnell Preskey with the North Dakota Association of Counties. One of my roles at NDACo is serving as executive director for the county auditors association. The Auditors are very much in support of SB 2142.

NDCC 16.1.07-12 restricts the absentee board of processing ballots to **the day before election day through the closing of the polls on election day**. This bill seeks to allow for processing of the ballots to begin **3 business days before the election**.

Auditors made the request for this bill to be introduced. This is an issue that came to our attention during the 2020 elections as well as the increase of voters of the past few years in utilizing vote by mail options to cast their ballot.

| Election     | Total Ballots | Ballots Cast Prior to Election Day (%) |
|--------------|---------------|--|
| 2020 General | 364,251       | 273,105 (75%)                          |
| 2020 Primary | 160,114       | 160,114 (100%)                         |
| 2018 General | 330,598       | 157,231 (48%)                          |
| 2018 Primary | 115,226       | 115,226 (40%)                          |
| 2016 General | 349,945       | 134,803 (38%)                          |
| 2016 Primary | 139,957       | 49,829 (36%)                           |
|              |               |  |

Background: With the June Primary election being all vote by mail (due to COVID-19 pandemic) auditors recognized there would be an unprecedented number of ballots to

process – and requested the Governor to allow for additional time to process the ballots, which was granted. The executive order issued for the June primary, increased the time to process vote by mail ballots from two days to 5 days. The Governor, through a separate executive order, and again by our request, authorized counties to begin the processing of ballots 4 business days prior to the General Election.

We ask you today to help us in future elections by increasing the time to process ballots for the following reasons:

- Increase in citizens voting prior to Election Day.
- Makes it easier to hire election workers to fill the absentee board to process ballots if shorter days as work is very tedious.
- If additional days are not allowed, the absentee boards can be expected to work 12-16 hours each of the two days. This can lead to errors and poll worker burnout and an unwillingness to assist in future elections.
- Timeliness of results impacts the trust in our voting system in North Dakota. Citizens have come to expect results on election night. Without the additional days to process ballots, auditors have indicated that results will surely be delayed hours, and potentially days, which in turn could cause voters to lose trust in the process.

The work the absentee board does to process ballots is very tedious. The absentee ballot boards are a second set of eyes to ensure the integrity of the election process. The protocols listed below are followed by every county:

1. Compare the signatures on the application and ballot envelope.
2. Open the ballot envelope.
3. Remove the secrecy sleeve which holds the ballot from the ballot envelope.
4. Remove the ballot from the secrecy sleeve.
5. Initial ballots to make them official ballots.
6. Run ballots through the scanner.

It is important to highlight that this protocol is followed for every absentee/mail ballot before it is counted. Ballots would not be **tabulated** until the polls close on Election day.

We surveyed counties regarding the amount of time to process absentee/vote by mail ballots in the general election and the number of workers involved. On average it took 12 hours with 8 people working. Here are a few examples, showing you the difference between our large and small counties.

Burleigh – 24 hours - 30 workers

Cass – 24 hours - 24 workers

Stark – 36 hours - 5 workers

McHenry – 8 hours - 8 workers

Rolette – 10 hours – 7 workers

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration and encourage you to give SB 2142 a Do Pass Recommendation.