



March 21, 2025

Senate State and Local Government Committee
Representative Austen Schauer, Chair
HB 1307

RE: Testimony of Deputy Mayor Denise Kolpack, City of Fargo, in SUPPORT of HB 1307

Chairman Roers and Members of the Senate State and Local Government Committee, my name is Denise Kolpack and I am honored to serve as a Fargo City Commissioner since July 2022 and Deputy Mayor since July 2024.

In 2018, following 18 months of work by a citizens' task force to study a variety of election issues, citizens of Fargo initiated a measure to consider changing city elections to implement an approval voting process. The measure passed in the 2018 General Election, where more than 47,000 voters passed the measure with 64% approving. The process has been used in the last three elections.

Having read past testimony and a summation of the work of the task force, I know that one of the issues they were trying to solve for was the trend of having small percentages of voters – 15% - 20% - electing at-large city commissioners. I can tell you in my election, we had 15 candidates for two seats, and as the first-place vote getter in my election, I won with 43%.

I also believe approval voting is very intuitive and encourages more citizen engagement. In fact, when I decided to run for city commission in 2022, I leveraged approval voting as part of my campaign strategy. Basically, I asked voters and different constituencies if they heard or learned something about me that resonated with them, or supported, in this non-partisan office, to add me to their list of votes as a qualified candidate.

I have also had feedback that the approval voting process has been more favorable to one party over another. I can assure you that the current make-up of the Fargo City Commission, again a non-partisan office, has had very vocal political preferences as expressed by Commissioners themselves, across the entire political spectrum – including mine of remaining independently non-partisan.

Finally, I have also heard that some concern may be the lack of consistency in election processes. Across North Dakota there are many variations today from city to town – including candidates who are at-large as in Fargo, those coming from Wards, and combinations in-between.

I respectfully ask you, the members of this Committee, for a **DO NOT PASS** recommendation on House Bill 1307, which would negate the will of voters in Fargo who passed Approval Voting in Fargo overwhelmingly, and have now used it in three elections. Thank you for this opportunity.

Denise Kolpack

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