

HOUSE GOVERNMENT & VETERAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Representative Jim Kasper, Chairman
House Bill 1253
January 28, 2021

Chairman Kasper, and members of the Committee.

I am Judy DeWitz, a Disabilities Advocate with the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project (P&A). P&A is an independent state agency that acts to protect persons with disabilities from abuse, neglect and exploitation, and one that advocates for the human, civil and legal rights of persons with disabilities.

The number of North Dakota voters who have been voting absentee or voting-by-mail has been growing in the last years. Many voters prefer to vote from home because it allows them to avoid the challenges of getting to the polls, waiting in line, and facing physical barriers at the polling space, including exposure to COVID-19. There are individuals with disabilities requesting the same benefits and rights that all voters have – the right to vote by mail.

Voters with sight issues, face the barrier of working with “print”. However, the tools needed to provide an accommodation currently, are not available to them when voting by mail. For some time, North Dakota organizations and individuals representing those who are blind, have discussed accommodations with the expectation that a resolution could be found.

It is understood that one possible solution might be HB 1253 which would allow voters to complete their ballot at home, on their own electronics. However, to cast their vote, the ballot would have to be transferred to a bar-code that would need to be delivered by the voter to their polling site. Many (or most) voters could not complete the transfer of that document. This system is not “vote-by-mail.” All voters need to have a secure way to cast a ballot by mail, including those with disabilities.

North Dakota does provide voting-by-mail to those out of the country/military, using a system that the voter can complete entirely at home. It is understood that this is not a complete solution, however, it is closer to the accommodations for voters who are blind than what is currently being offered.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.