Testimony in opposition to HB 1397
March 26, 2021

Chair Burckhard and Members of the Political Subdivisions Committee:

Fair. Open. Accessible.

Good day. I am Karen Ehrens, a resident of Bismarck and member of the League of Women Voters. The state of North Dakota has in front of us a once-in-a-decade opportunity to ensure that when our legislative districts are re-apportioned and district lines are re-drawn, the process happens in a **fair, open and accessible** manner.

In the best and most democratic way, a group that makes recommendations and decisions should be independent and not made up of elected officials who stand to directly benefit from the way that lines are drawn. If it is to be a committee of the legislature, representing the people of North Dakota, that will draw these lines, that committee has important responsibilities to me and to all of us represented by this body. Redistricting impacts our lives in every way.

While there will be a short timeframe in which to take the data obtained in the U.S. Census and prepare the districts in time for elections, a short timeframe is no excuse to deny input by the people of the state who will be impacted by these decisions for the next 10 years. With the new meeting technology in place this year, with advance planning, and with determination, the members of a redistricting committee can set up a process that is **fair, open and accessible**.

There are tools available to guide a redistricting process. The League of Women Voters of the United States partnered with the Campaign Legal Center (CLC) to produce a redistricting transparency report: Designing a Transparent and Ethical Redistricting Process: A Guide to Ensuring that the Redistricting Process is Fair, Open, and Accessible. The link is shared with you right here to serve as a blueprint and guide for the work of the redistricting committee.

Key recommendations of this report are not currently included in this bill to guide the work of North Dakota's Redistricting Committee, and I recommend that they be included to ensure that the process of redistricting in North Dakota is transparent, **fair, open and accessible**. Recommendations from the Guide include that the redistricting process shall:

- Require a minimal number of meetings or public hearings throughout the state;
- Require all data used by the committee to be made public in accessible formats;
- Require all draft maps and reports to be released on a publicly-accessible website;
- Require a reasonable public comment period for proposed maps;
- Require that committee members act in an impartial way and follow ethical standards.

Special consideration must also be given so that the members of the five tribal nations in the state of North Dakota have a role in the redistricting process, and that their communities are kept as intact as possible in the drawing of the districts.

I ask you to not pass HB 1397 as written, but improve it to include critical provisions to make the redistricting process **fair, open and accessible**.

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