

Greetings.

My name is Jeffrey Powell and I live in Grand Forks.

I rise in opposition to House Bill 1273 and I ask the Political Subdivisions Committee to grant to this bill a Do Not Pass recommendation.

Approval Voting has been adopted by the City of Fargo, and I for one believe the expansion of Ranked Choice Voting and of Approval Voting will improve our representative democracy. Acting under their Home Rule charter, the people of the City of Fargo selected this voting mechanism. Mr Koppelman – who does not live in Fargo – is using his position as a legislator to tell a neighboring community what they must do. This is not in furtherance of any agenda except his own – to ensure that first-past-the-poll elections keep current politicians in office, even when the policy agendas pursued by these incumbents are increasing less popular.

Ranked Choice Voting and Approval Voting, the named targets of 1273, are both mechanisms of elections that are used around the globe and in fact are used in other parts of the United States. These voting systems are used successfully around the United States. The facts are clear that this voting mechanism does not favor either party, but only favors compromise and general agreeability. The premise of both Ranked Choice Voting and Approval Voting systems is that politicians who work to meet the needs and fulfill the wishes of constituents who hold diverse and sometimes divergent views are the politicians who garner the respect of those constituents. Mr Koppelman is quoted in the Fargo Forum – I hope it's a misquote – quoted as saying it is unAmerican to expect a politician to seek approval from all constituents. A fear of Approval Voting and a fear of Ranked Choice Voting generally belies a politician who intends only to deliver for his base rather than do what is good for all members of his community. Under Approval Voting and Ranked Choice Voting, candidates garner votes from voters who believe an incumbent has done a good job, including those voters who might generally disagree with the philosophy of the candidate. These voting systems inspire citizens to be more openminded about candidates and requires candidates and politicians to be less dogmatic.

These voting systems cause politicians to do a better job of reaching out to those of different opinions and a better job of making sure that they are doing the will of people, of a larger swath of people than those who inherently are likely to vote for that member when they face reelection. We all talk about how polarized our politics are, and first-past-the-poll voting contributes to that polarization. First-past-the-poll voting advantages those politicians committed to serving their base voters and only those base voters. Our political system works best when reasonable people meet in the middle of our various camps, and having a legislative restriction on local decision making takes away a tool of reasonability.

Not only should the legislature check its desire to stifle local control in these matter, it should encourage more boards and commissions to examine Ranked Choice Voting and Approval Voting systems. The adoption of these voting systems would prove beneficial to school board races, county commission races, and other multi-representative districts across our state. I honestly believe Ranked Choice Voting would improve the representative standing of our State Legislature. Working with our neighbors is American, and in his characterization of cross-party cooperation as an unAmerican concept Mr Koppelman is decidedly and wholly wrong.

I understand Conservative politicians are afraid of an electorate that may in the future have options not yet installed. I understand the goal of Conservative political ideology is to grasp and retain power for the sake of having power. That singular goal of having power does not benefit our communities. Taking choice away from the citizens of a county, of a school district, or of a city by a legislature afraid of those citizens is not honorable. And there is no way to sugarcoat this – Bill 1273 is a bad bill written in bad faith and for bad cause. It deserves to be defeated.

Thank you for your time.