

Support of HB 1236

Senate State and Local Government Committee

March 10, 2023

Good morning, Madam Chair Roers and Committee members.

I am Larry Syverson from Mayville, I raise soybeans on my farm in Traill County and I am the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors for Roseville Township and I am also the Executive Secretary of the North Dakota Township Officers Association. NDTOA represents nearly 6,000 Township Officers that serve in more than 1,100 dues paying member townships.

HB 1236 deals with two issues our membership has asked us to have changed. The first is the date for the annual meeting of the township, 58-04-01 sets this date as the third Tuesday of March. It has probably been the third Tuesday of March ever since townships were established by the Dakota Territorial Legislature. That date has worked quite well for the many decades, township day was a bit of a highlight of the season as the winter waned and farmers prepared for planting season. It was a social event as much as an exercise of democracy. Citizens hardly traveled out of the township in those days and a chance to meet with neighbors was a time to cherish. The regard for township day has faded a bit since then, the average vehicle puts on about 41 miles per day, everyone is constantly somewhere else, school functions, sporting events and winter vacations are some of the reasons citizens don't make the meeting.

I am very committed to local control, so I won't let very many things keep me away from the annual meeting of Roseville Township. Even advocating for the townships of North Dakota before the legislature for about nine sessions or so has not kept me away. The meetings are scheduled in the evening because a good number of our citizens get off work at about 5 pm and the evenings work better for them, and so far, it has worked for me. I have been able to make the three-hour trip in time for the meeting and often return to Bismarck that night after the meeting. Should HB 1236 pass I will ask the attendees of this annual meeting, on Tuesday March 21st, if they would be ok with changing future meetings to the following Saturday. That way I would not need to make an extra commute for the 3rd Tuesday of March in legislative years.

Township day is still an important event, it is the basis of our local control, it should be attended by as many citizens as possible. I personally am fond of the third Tuesday of March as annual meeting day but I realize that many conflicts have drawn citizens away. So, we are asking that 58-04-01 be amended to allow that townships may meet on any day in March so they can work around local events that keep people away.

One great benefit, should HB 1236 pass, would be the ability to schedule alternative storm days in the required published meeting notice. The current law doesn't seem to give us any options if the weather is uncooperative on the one permitted day.

HB 1236 has two sections to deal with this change we are requesting. Section 1 is for the annual meeting of a regular single township under 58-04-01. Section 2 covers annual meetings under 58-05.1-07 where the electors have joined multiple townships under a mutli-township board.

The other issue is the maximum limit of township officer compensation. We have heard that some townships find it ever more difficult to get people to take on the responsibilities of these offices with the pay limited to just sixty dollars per day. The current sixty-dollar cap was set in 2011. Three sections of HB 1236 address the compensation caps for officers. Section 3 sets the compensation of supervisors, Section 4 the clerk, and Section 5 is for the treasurer.

Necessary service for the officers may be a matter of board meeting attendance or it could be going out to barricade a washed-out culvert or flooded road. It may be hours of driving the roads for inspection. Townships don't have staff, the officers have to insure the safety of the roads along with their other duties.

The compensation cap for the officers is permissive, a township does not have to pay anything and many will continue to pay little or nothing, it is the elector's choice, it is set by the electors at the annual meeting. This is just a cap.

Madam Chair Roers and Committee members, the membership of the North Dakota Township Officers Association requests your favorable recommendation for HB 1236.

Thank you. I will try to answer any questions you may have.