Senate State & Local Government Committee
March 17th, 2023
HB 1273 - Testimony in Opposition

Chair Roers and members of the Senate State and Local Government Committee, my name is Whitney Oxendahl and I am writing in opposition to HB 1273. I was one of the volunteers who gathered signatures for the approval voting ballot initiative in Fargo.

I got involved in the approval voting ballot initiative, because of recent city commission races. We had had large fields of candidates running for a small number of open seats, such as in 2016 there were 11 candidates running for two open seats. The top two candidates won with 30.4% and 28.1%, and approval voting was a simple solution to electing candidates with a higher percentage of voter support.

When gathering signatures for the ballot measure, approval voting had bipartisan support among signees. Some voters liked it because it gave them the freedom to choose any candidates they approved of. Others liked it because they were disillusioned with the low percentage of votes supporting the winners of city commission races. All-around, people liked this voting method because it wouldn't cost anything to implement; it was compatible with our current election machines.

The approval voting ballot measure passed with nearly 2 out of 3 voters supporting it, and House Bill 1273 would override the will of Fargo voters.

The argument that it would make a patchwork of voting methods in our state is inconsistent with other aspects of voting. There are a handful of cities across the state that vote by ward while most others vote at-large for city commission or city council. Wahpeton employs a mix and elects some council members at-large and others by ward. These differences in city elections are up to the cities, not the state.

I urge the committee to keep this aspect of running elections to cities and continue allowing local voters to choose their voting method. Please give House Bill 1273 a Do Not Pass recommendation. Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony.