



HB 1297
House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee
January 30, 2025

Chair Schauer and members of the House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Carol Sawicki, and I am submitting testimony on behalf of the League of Women Voters of North Dakota in opposition to House Bill 1297.

The League of Women Voters supports legislation that allows local jurisdictions to explore alternative electoral methods and supports state election laws that allow for more options at both the state and local levels. HB 1297 would prohibit ranked choice and approval voting methods, thereby constricting rather than allowing more options.

Both ranked choice and approval voting methods have been adopted in various states and localities around the country, including the City of Fargo, which uses approval voting in elections for city officials. Ranked choice and approval voting methods allow voters to be more expressive with who they wish to represent them and ensure that the winner in an election will be the most popular candidate.

In ranked choice voting, voters are given the option to rank candidates on the ballot in order of preference, and voters know that if their first choice does not get enough votes to win, their vote automatically counts for their next choice instead. This voting method yields election outcomes that better represent voter preferences. Legal challenges to ranked choice voting have resulted in ranked choice voting being “uniformly upheld in federal courts as a lawful policy choice within the states’ constitutional authority to administer elections.”¹

In approval voting, voters choose as many candidates as they support without ranking them in any specific order. The candidate with a majority of support will generally win (unlike traditional plurality voting in which a candidate with the largest *minority* often wins). The Center for Election Science has determined that approval voting encourages candidates to build coalition and consensus, prevents voters from having to split their vote between similar candidates, and is an accurate and transparent voting system.²

In November 2018, Fargo citizens voted 63.52% to 36.48% to amend the city charter to implement approval voting. The League of Women Voters of North Dakota supports the right of Fargo citizens to continue to vote using the method they have deemed most fair, simple, accurate, and consistent with ND Century Code 40-05.1-06 Subsection 9 which

¹Congressional Research Services. Ranked-Choice Voting: Legal Challenges and Considerations for Congress. 10-12-22. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/LSB/LSB10837>

² Why CES Advocates for Approval Voting. <https://electionscience.org/education/why-approval-voting>



gives home rule cities the powers “to provide for all matters pertaining to city elections, except as to qualifications of electors.”

Since HB 1297 would prevent North Dakota citizens from implementing alternative voting methods, the **League of Women Voters of North Dakota strongly urges committee members to give HB 1297 a Do Not Pass recommendation.**

Thank you, Chair Schauer and members of the committee, for your consideration of our testimony.

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