

**HOUSE GOVERNMENT & VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**REPRESENTATIVE AUSTEN SCHAUER, CHAIRMAN**

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY**

**MICHAEL HOWE, SECRETARY OF STATE**

Chairman Schauer and members of the committee, I'm Michael Howe, North Dakota Secretary of State. Our office supports HB 1297.

Since I took office in 2023, our office has sought to streamline processes and has looked to make consistent policies across all 40 duties that the Office of the Secretary of State oversees. In the last two years, we have made significant progress in informing the electorate of how North Dakota's election process can be trusted, and informed our citizens how proactive the legislature has been in implementing common sense election integrity reforms, such as:

- The legislature has passed one of the most robust and thorough voter ID laws in the country.
- North Dakota does not mass mail ballots.
- Absentee voting requires proof of identification before a ballot is mailed.
- We only use paper ballots in North Dakota elections.
- Our tabulation equipment does not connect to the internet.
- We have banned private money from funding election administration at all levels of government.
- And last session, we successfully passed legislation that ensures only United States citizens are voting in North Dakota elections.

As North Dakota's chief election official, my office oversees elections across the state in partnership with all 53 counties. Our elections in North Dakota have a top-down process. Each county uses the same election equipment, has the same processes, and follows the same laws passed by the legislature and prescribed by the Office of the Secretary of State. In other states, you may see a bottom-up process where each political subdivision uses different equipment or has a different process. North Dakota's uniform process lends itself to easier, efficient, and secure election administration.

Ranked choice voting has been implemented in various parts of the United States and often has proven to be a failed experiment. In fact, some cities have tried ranked choice voting and scrapped the method after citizens complained about the complicated process in which the votes are tallied and winners were decided.

The administration of ranked choice voting may create complications for our county auditors who are tabulating the results, thus causing delays in election results. In this era of building trust in our election system, we simply cannot afford to have complications or delays in any election. All the goodwill we have built in the last two years of our statewide election education would be eroded because of a nonsense formula to tabulate election results. Passage of HB 1297 is another proactive approach the legislature can take to ensure our elections are easily understood and uniformly administered across every political subdivision.

Ranked choice voting confuses voters, puts an added burden on volunteer election workers, and the cumbersome formula to determine a winner unnecessarily adds fuel to those that may question the integrity of our elections. Our office has successfully disarmed many of those doubts by continually educating North Dakotans about our trusted election process.

Our office prefers a uniform election system at all levels as opposed to unorthodox election methods sporadically implemented across the state.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, HB 1297 is a commonsense bill and I hope the committee gives it a DO PASS recommendation.