



North Dakota Ethics Commission
House Bill 1469
Testimony presented by
Rebecca Binstock, Executive Director
Before the House Political Subdivisions Committee
February 7, 2025

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Committee members, my name is Rebecca Binstock. I serve as the Executive Director of the North Dakota Ethics Commission.

North Dakota citizens created the Ethics Commission in 2018 by passing an initiated measure which created Article XIV of the North Dakota Constitution. The Ethics Commission, an independent constitutional entity, consists of five commissioners:

- Chair Dave Anderson (Bismarck)
- Vice-Chair Ward Koeser (Williston)
- Dr. Cynthia Lindquist (Grand Forks)
- Ron Goodman (Oakes)
- Murray Sagsveen (Bismarck)

HB 1469

Establishing the Ethics Commission to support “open, ethical, and accountable government” is the cornerstone of Article XIV of the North Dakota Constitution. The Commission is testifying in support of HB 1469 because it increases open, ethical, and accountable government by providing North Dakota citizens access to current information about their leaders. With HB 1469, North Dakota joins forty-seven (47) other states which have annual reporting of public official’s interests.

Under current law, statements of interest are filed with the Secretary of State when an individual is a candidate for elected office and when individuals are appointed by the governor to a state agency, board, bureau, commission, department, or occupational or

professional licensing board. An individual does not update the statement of interest until and unless the individual runs for reelection or is re-appointed.

HB 1469 increases transparency of our state government by requiring public officials to update their statements of interest annually. This requirement ensures public officials are keeping this information up-to-date while they are in office, not just during election season or at the time of appointment. By requiring an annual update, HB 1469 promotes an informed electorate and promotes a culture of transparency, accountability, and informed decision making by our public officials.

The bill provides further transparency by requiring statements of interest received by the Secretary of State to be published online. Currently, to access statements of interest, North Dakotans are required to make an open record request. Paper forms then need to be retrieved and scanned to provide them to requestors in an electronic format.

Section 16.1-09-02 was first enacted in 1981 and has not been substantively amended since that time. However, with increasing (nearly instant) accessibility to information, the citizens of North Dakota's expectation of transparency in government has undoubtedly evolved since 1981. This bill meets those expectations.

HB 1469 also aligns North Dakota's financial disclosure requirements with de facto national standards. With passage of HB 1469, North Dakota will become the 48th state to have annual filing of statements of interest or similar financial disclosure statements. Michigan is the most recent state to move to annual filings, with its new law in effect as of 2024. Based upon the Commission's research, only one state – Idaho - does not have financial disclosure requirements for public officials or state employees.

The Ethics Commission wholeheartedly backs HB 1469 as it moves through the legislative process and requests a Do Pass recommendation by the committee. Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony, and I will gladly stand for any questions you may have.