

Chairwoman Roers, Vice Chair Castaneda, and members of the Senate State and Local Government committee - my name is Mike Blessum. I am a Minot resident and sitting alderman on the Minot City Council. I'd like to give you my perspectives on SB2175 and ask you for a do pass recommendation. These thoughts are mine and are not the official positions of the City of Minot or other council members.

During the 2021 and 2023 legislative sessions I worked with various legislators to bring bills to try to tighten up ND election laws to fix current problems and avoid having issues from other states make their way here. In those two sessions more than 80 election bills were considered by the two chambers with only one signed into law in 2021. While there were important updates to the century code in that bill, I don't believe that there were any additional protections put in place in the wake of the 2016 and 2020 contested elections.

In my time as an election judge in Minot vote centers I have seen first hand the vulnerabilities that exist in our systems. While our elections are well run by hard working, dedicated volunteers, there is always room for improvement. I don't believe that we will find large scale issues or fraud. Rather, I believe that the audits will validate our processes and identify any small areas where we can make improvements. For example, at large vote centers we have ongoing issues with the numerous ballots that judges hand out to voters – more than 40 ballot types in our center in Minot. Identifying how often the wrong ballot is handed to an elector should be found if a hand count is administered.

Senate bill 2175 is similar to a bill I worked with Senator Boehm and Representative Henderson on in the 2023 session. I am very happy to see that Chairwoman Roers has brought this bill to try to put safeguards in place to ensure that ND elections remain accurate and secure. I believe that performing audits across the state that include hand counts will provide a new level of confidence and integrity in our election systems.

I would ask you to return a do pass recommendation on SB2175 to protect our elections and restore the confidence of the public.

Thank you for your consideration. I would stand for any questions.

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