

Written Testimony for the
Senate State and Local Government

January 23, 2025

Erica Johnsrud, McKenzie County Auditor/Treasurer



RE: OPPOSITION for SB 2178

Good morning, Chairwoman Roers, and members of the Senate State and Local Government Committee. My name is Erica Johnsrud and I have the honor of serving as the Auditor/Treasurer for McKenzie County. I stand in opposition of SB 2178.

The intent of this bill is to change the way North Dakotans vote in primary elections moving from an open primary, where the voter has the choice, *in the voting booth*, to vote their party of choice to a closed primary, where the voter must disclose to the election workers their choice of party before receiving a ballot.

This legislation, in its current form, would increase costs to counties for additional ballots and workers, place possible limitations on polling locations, create additional challenges for balancing and handling ballots, and decrease voter anonymity.

Elections are expensive. By the time the McKenzie County 2024 primary election was over, the cost per vote was \$17.21 (total election costs of \$29,383.54). For the 2024 General election that cost per vote was \$5.13 (total election costs of \$28,515.93). There are several reasons for the difference between the two, but mostly due to the lower voter turnouts that traditionally occur in primary elections. Because I have to be prepared in the event that every qualified elector in the County shows up to vote, I have to have enough ballots on hand to accommodate that scenario, which doesn't differ much from Primary Election to General Election. If the Primary Election shifts to a closed primary, I will now have to purchase three times (or more) the number of ballots, depending on the number of parties that qualify to be printed on the ballot, because each voter would have the option to pick any party they wish, a 3x increase in costs for ballots alone, not to mention programming, layout, and testing costs.

Costs would also be increased due to the need for additional election workers. During the 2024 Primary Election, McKenzie County poll workers in each polling location had 18 different ballots to manage. This bill would move that to 54 different ballots (or more). Larger counties, like Burleigh or Cass or Ward, would likely have in excess of 150-200 different ballots. Due to this large number of different ballots, I would need to find larger polling locations in my rural areas to accommodate the extra needed space and security for these ballots within the location. It is already challenging to find sufficient election workers and places willing to be used as polling locations. My devoted workers for the last many years continue to ask for a reduction in the number of ballots they handle, not an

increase. This would also increase the time it takes to get results, as election workers would have to balance and reconcile numbers for each different ballot. There may also be an increase in voters receiving the wrong ballot if election workers are stressed or under pressure to get a ballot to the voter, especially if there is a long line of voters waiting.

Other administrative tasks, all important to the integrity and security of North Dakota elections, would have increased challenges. Logic and accuracy testing would become more complicated and take more time – vital testing that happens at the same time as other tasks within the County Auditor’s Office.

The bill in Section 2 would decrease voter anonymity, a very important component of elections as every voter should be allowed to vote their ballot in any manner they choose. Section 2 would allow the public to request party designation information for voters. Political committees, political parties, and candidates would be able to request the complete voter name, complete voter residential address, and six years of voter history “including the political party associated with a ballot furnished to the voter.”

This bill would unnecessarily increase costs, complexity, timeliness of results, and difficulty in finding election workers and polling locations in already challenging times.

I urge a **DO NOT PASS** recommendation on SB 2178.