

HB1467 Testimony – House Political Subdivisions Committee – 2/2/2023 9:30 AM

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Chairman Longmuir and House Political Subdivisions Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1467. For the record my name is Mike Blessum. I am a small business owner, husband, and father from District 5 in Minot. I would like to thank Representative Donna Henderson for introducing this bill and Senator Keith Boehm for sponsoring its counterpart in the senate.

In the 2021 session more than 40 election related bills made their way through the legislature. As of this yesterday there are 40 bills again this session. I believe the people of our state have concerns about election integrity and have asked their representatives to tighten our laws.

HB1467 adds a section to chapter 16.1-01 of ND Century Code. The bill would require the state auditor's office to perform a special investigation of 2 counties within 90 days of the certification of each primary and general election.

I served as an election judge in the 2022 primary and general elections at the State Fair Center in Minot. I'd like to paint a bit of a picture of what happened in our vote center during the last election cycle. For both elections we had approximately 12 election clerks, 6 judges, and 1 inspector that worked a 14-15 hour shift. It was a wonderful team of Republicans and Democrats united to do a great job for the voters of our county. Here are a few of the issues I personally witnessed at our voting center.

- Because all eligible electors in the county could vote at any of the polling places, we had more than 40 different ballot types in the June election and more than 20 in November. I know that I personally handed at least 2 incorrect ballots to electors in those elections because the voters brought them back to me.
- After the polls close we complete a series of steps to secure the ballots and tie out our various counts. In both elections our counts were off (1 vote in June and 5 votes in November). I believe this issue was due to internet communication errors between the electronic poll books and the central voter file.
- We had more than one issue related to the central voter file following redistricting. At least one street in Minot that was moved from district 3 to district 5 was not updated correctly, causing the incorrect ballot to be handed to voters. I also know of a couple that were allowed to vote using an old address that had not been updated.
- We had many ballots reject from the tabulation machines. Most were due to extraneous marks on the ballot or other mistakes by the voter. The sensitivity seemed to be much higher in the November election vs. June.
- Because of our setup in the entryway of the state fair center we had numerous unauthorized people passing through the voting center throughout the day. We also dealt with overcrowding that led to long lines in the cold.
- We had one voter try to vote a second time and multiple voters that walked into the vote center with absentee ballots in their hands.

Why do these small issues matter? Isn't 99%+ accuracy enough? In the case of the June election the winner of the district 3 Republican primary led on election night by 1 vote. After canvassing the final difference was 8 votes. Regardless of the outcome every elector deserves to have their vote counted accurately.

I understand the reluctance the legislature has shown over the last two sessions to make changes to our voting systems. Major investments have been made and our elected officials have a vested interest in public confidence in our processes. This bill allows you to reassure the public that the integrity of our election systems matter and that you are willing to back up the statements that everything is fine. I would ask that you show the voters of North Dakota that you care about how our elections are conducted and return a do pass recommendation on HB1467.

Thank you Chairman Longmuir and members of the committee. I am happy to stand for any questions you may have.