

2025 HOUSE POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS

HB 1178

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Political Subdivisions Committee Room JW327B, State Capitol

HB 1178
1/17/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to school districts allowing students to leave campus to vote in elections.

11:16 a.m. Chairman Longmuir opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Longmuir, Vice-Chairman Fegley, Vice-Chairman Jonas, Representatives Bolinske, Hager, Hatlestad, Heilman, Klemin, Motschenbacher, Ostlie, Toman, Warrey

Members Absent: Representative Davis

Discussion Topics:

- Voting by mail
- Voting security
- North Dakota polling locations
- Employer voting laws

11:16 a.m. Representative Anna Novak, North Dakota Representative for District 33, introduced the bill and provided testimony #29794.

11:22 a.m. Zofia Dostal, North Dakota Public School System graduate, testified in favor and provided testimony #29608.

11:26 a.m. Michael Howe, North Dakota Secretary of State, testified in favor and provided testimony #29796.

11:35 a.m. Representative Ostlie moved a Do Pass.

11:35 a.m. Representative Hager seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	Y
Representative Clayton Fegley	Y
Representative Jim Jonas	Y
Representative Macy Bolinske	Y
Representative Jayme Davis	A
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	Y
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	Y
Representative Matthew Heilman	Y
Representative Lawrence R. Klemin	Y

Representative Mike Motschenbacher	Y
Representative Mitch Ostlie	Y
Representative Nathan Toman	Y
Representative Jonathan Warrey	Y

11:37 a.m. Motion passed 12-0-1

11:37 a.m. Representative Hager will carry the bill.

Additional written testimony:

Ava Oyen, Beulah, North Dakota, submitted testimony in favor #29595.

Dustin Amundson, Bismarck citizen, provided testimony in favor #28457.

Catherine Benton, Grand Forks, North Dakota, provided testimony in favor #28884.

Maci Behm, High School Social Studies teacher in Beulah, provided testimony in favor #29081.

Barbara Dunn, Fargo, North Dakota, provided testimony in favor #29362

Carol Sawicki, Board Member for the League of Women Voters of North Dakota, provided testimony in favor #29760

11:37 a.m. Chairman Longmuir closed the hearing.

Wyatt Armstrong, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1178 ([25.0085.01000](#))

Political Subdivisions Committee (Rep. Longmuir, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** (12 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). HB 1178 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.

My name is Dustin Amundson. I live in Bismarck (District 30). Please give this bill a do pass recommendation. I would like to see it amended to include everybody. Election day should be a state holiday.

Catherine Benton
HB 1178
January 13, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 1178.

My name is Catherine Benton, and I am writing to express my strong support for this bill. HB 1178, which mandates school districts to adopt a policy allowing qualified student electors to leave campus to vote in elections, is a crucial step towards fostering civic engagement and ensuring the active participation of our young citizens in the democratic process.

First and foremost, this bill empowers students by recognizing their right to vote and making it more accessible. By allowing students to leave campus to vote in general, special, or primary elections, we are removing barriers that may prevent them from exercising their constitutional right. This is especially important for young voters who are often first-time participants in the electoral process and may face challenges in finding time to vote outside of their school commitments.

Moreover, HB 1178 encourages the development of lifelong voting habits. Research has shown that individuals who vote in their first eligible election are more likely to continue voting in future elections. By facilitating student voting, we are fostering a culture of civic responsibility and engagement that will benefit our society as a whole.

Additionally, this bill promotes equity and inclusion by ensuring that all eligible students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have the opportunity to vote. Many students may lack access to reliable transportation or may have work and family obligations that make it difficult to vote outside of school hours. By allowing them to leave campus to vote, we are ensuring that all voices are heard and represented in our elections.

In conclusion, I urge you to vote YES on HB 1178. This bill represents a significant step towards empowering our young citizens, fostering civic engagement, and promoting a more inclusive and equitable society. Let's support our students and strengthen our democracy by making voting more accessible for all.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Catherine Benton

clbenton@hotmail.com

701.412.7917

Regarding HB 1178

January 14, 2025

My name is Maci Behm. I am a high school social studies teacher in Beulah, North Dakota. Please give this bill a do pass recommendation. As a government teacher, I stress to my students the importance of participating in the government. We spend a lot of class time discussing different ways that students can participate such as voting and being knowledgeable about candidates and issues. As a class we cover voting rights and how hard Americans have worked throughout history to gain the right to vote. Most high school seniors taking a government class understand the importance of voting. Many are excited to vote for the first time during their senior year. North Dakota Civics and Government Benchmark C.6_12.4.5 states students should demonstrate active participation in civic life. I believe that allowing students to use a small part of their school day for voting provides students with the opportunity to reach that benchmark.

I am writing in support of HB 1178. I was an in-state college student once and being allowed to leave campus in order to vote in an election would've been very helpful. If the amount of time allowed had been long enough, I could've even traveled to my home town. If voting in the town of my campus had been allowed, I would've done that since voting is not only a right, it's a duty. I think allowing our young people to vote by giving this bill a do-pass recommendation will result in improvements in our civic discourse and so contribute in myriad ways to quality of life for all North Dakotans. Thank you for your time.

Hello, my name is Ava Oyen and I am a senior at Beulah High School. In the government class all seniors must take we are taught about voting and how important it is. Despite this, we are not allotted time for voting. This past November I was able to vote in my first election but I had to go during my off hour. Many seniors did not have this free time and it discouraged them from voting after school because of the interference with many after school activities. Please consider voting yes on House Bill 1178 because it will encourage eligible seniors to vote as it is our civic duty to do so. Thank you.

Hello, I'm Zofia Dostal from District 33, and I am a graduate of the North Dakota public school system. I am here to testify on how the lack of a voting policy in our public schools has made it difficult, if not impossible, for many eligible voters to participate in federal and local elections, leaving many voices unheard.

During my time at Beulah High School, I remember feeling this sense of hope and pride in the opportunity to participate in our fine democracy. This pride quickly soured into disappointment as I witnessed many upperclassmen give up their opportunity to vote in the 2020 election because they were stuck in class and did not want to risk being counted as absent. While I was lucky enough to vote by mail in my first election just this last November, I recognize that this is not the reality for many young adults.

With each election cycle, a new generation of voices emerges, and the passing of this bill would ensure that these voices are heard. This bill would help to remove barriers that could restrict many high school students from making it to the polls when they may not have been able to make it otherwise. It may also encourage a lot of high schoolers to take their civic duty more seriously by emphasizing the importance of their participation.

Some may argue that HB 1178 is unnecessary because students have time outside of class to go to the polls, but this argument does not take into consideration the extra-curricular activities and after-school jobs that a majority of students take on, not to mention the homework they are assigned. There are also factors such as a lack of transportation that may hinder some students from making it to the polls. This bill would provide these students with an equal opportunity to exercise their constitutional right.

Studies have also shown that those who vote early in their life are more likely to continue voting as they grow. By allowing students time to go to the polls, it may help them build a life-long habit of civic engagement.

This bill is an important step toward ensuring that all eligible students have an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy. By providing students the time they need to vote, we remove barriers that currently prevent many young people from exercising their constitutional right. Not only will this bill give students the chance to make their voices heard, but it will also help cultivate a lifelong habit of civic engagement, encouraging future generations to take their civic responsibilities seriously. I urge you to support this bill, as it will strengthen our democracy by empowering young voters and ensuring that no voice is left unheard. Thank you for your time and your consideration.



HB 1178
House Political Subdivisions Committee
January 17, 2025

Chair Longmuir and members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee, I am Carol Sawicki, Board member and representative of the League of Women Voters of North Dakota.

HB 1178 requires school districts to adopt a policy allowing students to leave campus to vote in elections. **The League of Women Voters of North Dakota supports HB 1178.**

Studies have shown that:

- Youth who reported having been either encouraged to vote or taught how to register to vote in high school are more likely to vote and participate in other civic activities and more knowledgeable about voting processes;¹
- Voting in one election substantially increases the likelihood of voting in the future;²
- Providing time from school or work increases the likelihood of voting, particularly for youth who are struggling economically.³

Young people have unique and valuable perspectives on social issues and our democracy flourishes when these perspectives are represented in civic life. In addition, youth civic engagement can enhance their academic performance, social skills, and emotional well-being.⁴

We wish to thank Representative Novak and the other sponsors for submitting this bill, and **we ask the Committee to vote in favor of HB 1178.**

¹ [Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement](#)

² [Gerber, Green Shachar, 2003.](#)

³ [CIRCLE, Expanding the Electorate, 2018](#)

⁴ [CIRCLE, Why Is Youth Civic Engagement Important](#)



Legislative Assembly

NORTH DAKOTA
House of Representatives
STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Representative Anna S. Novak

District 33
1139 Elbowoods Drive
Hazen, ND 58545-4923
anovak@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Education
Energy and Natural Resources

January 17, 2025

Re: HB1178

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

For the record, my name is Anna Novak, Representative from District 33. Last spring, Zofia Dostal, a very ambitious senior from Beulah High School, approached me about sponsoring a bill idea that she had. We met locally and spoke about the bill, and then met with Legislative Council so she could see the process from start to finish. What you have before you is our finished product, HB1178.

This bill essentially directs all local school boards to adopt their own policy, allowing students 18 and older the opportunity to vote in elections. I am going to let Zofia present the bill to you, as it was her idea and she put the work into organizing this hearing. But I'd like to make a few points before I hand it over to her:

1. Not all counties in North Dakota have multiple polling locations. Where we live - Mercer County - we have one polling location, so it can take nearly an hour to get to that single polling location, depending upon where you live.
2. I have no concerns with voting by mail. Quite honestly, that's the avenue I've voted in every election for the past eight years. I track my ballot and feel great when I see that it was both received and accepted. However, I do recognize that not everyone likes to vote by mail - for whatever reason - which is why it's important to have the opportunity to vote in-person.
3. Instead of coming up with a one-size fits all approach and mandating that different school districts follow the same policy, we decided to instruct each district to formulate their own voting policy.

With that, I'm happy to stand for any questions the committee may have. Thank you.

HOUSE POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS
REPRESENTATIVE DONALD LONGMUIR, CHAIRMAN

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY

MICHAEL HOWE, SECRETARY OF STATE

Chairman Longmuir and members of the Committee, I am in full support of HB 1178. Participating in elections is a responsibility every eligible voter of the United States should carry. In the June 2024 Primary Election we only had 20% of eligible North Dakotans participate. In the 2024 November General Election we had 63% of eligible North Dakotans participate.

I applaud the bill sponsor and her cosponsors for emphasizing the importance for our newest eligible voters that voting is a civic duty to choose our leaders for our families, friends, and neighbors. My hope is that first time voters keep coming back to participate in every election- School, City, County, Statewide, and Federal. They are all equally important. I urge a Do Pass recommendation for HB 1178.

2025 SENATE EDUCATION

HB 1178

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Room JW216, State Capitol

HB 1178
3/5/2025

Relating to school districts allowing students to leave campus to vote in elections.
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1:30 p.m. Chairman Beard called the hearing to order.

Members Present: Chairman Beard; Vice-Chairman Lemm; Senators: Axtman, Boschee, Gerhardt, and Wobbema.

Discussion Topics:

- Limited voting places
- Flexibility of school schedule
- Discretion of individual school boards
- Encourage eligible students to vote
- Limit evening activities on voting day

1:30 p.m. Representative Novak, District #33, introduced the bill and submitted testimony #38954.

1:40 p.m. Zofia Dostal, citizen District 33, testified in favor and submitted testimony #38816.

1:46 p.m. Michael Howe, Secretary of State, testified in favor and submitted testimony #38905.

1:48 p.m. Amy De Kok, Executive Director, ND School Boards Association, testified in favor.

2:07 p.m. Amy De Kok, Executive Director ND School Boards Association, answered questions that the committee had.

2:10 p.m. Senator Boschee moved Do Not Pass.

2:10 p.m. Senator Axtman seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Todd Beard	Y
Senator Randy D. Lemm	Y
Senator Michelle Axtman	Y
Senator Josh Boschee	Y
Senator Justin Gerhardt	Y
Senator Mike Wobbema	Y

Motion Passed 6-0-0

Senator Gerhardt will carry the bill.

Additional written testimony:

Carol Sawicki, Board Member League of Women Voters of ND, submitted testimony in favor #38563.

2:10 p.m. Chairman Beard closed the hearing.

Susan Helbling, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1178 ([25.0085.01000](#))

Education Committee (Sen. Beard, Chairman) recommends **DO NOT PASS** (6 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1178 was placed on the Fourteenth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.



HB 1178
Senate Education Committee
March 5, 2025

Chair Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee. I am Carol Sawicki, Board member and representative of the League of Women Voters of North Dakota.

HB 1178 requires school districts to adopt a policy allowing students to leave campus to vote in elections. **The League of Women Voters of North Dakota supports HB 1178.**

Studies have shown that:

- Youth who reported having been either encouraged to vote or taught how to register to vote in high school are more likely to vote and participate in other civic activities and are more knowledgeable about voting processes;¹
- Voting in one election substantially increases the likelihood of voting in the future;²
- Providing time from school or work increases the likelihood of voting, particularly for youth who are struggling economically.³

Young people have unique and valuable perspectives on social issues and our democracy flourishes when these perspectives are represented in civic life. In addition, youth civic engagement can enhance their academic performance, social skills, and emotional well-being.⁴

Thank you for reviewing our testimony and we ask the Committee to vote in favor of HB 1178.

¹ [Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement](#)

² [Gerber, Green Shachar, 2003.](#)

³ [CIRCLE, Expanding the Electorate, 2018](#)

⁴ [CIRCLE, Why Is Youth Civic Engagement Important](#)

Hello, I'm Zofia Dostal from District 33, and I am a graduate of the North Dakota public school system. I am here to testify on how the lack of a voting policy in our public schools has made it difficult, if not impossible, for many eligible voters to participate in federal and local elections, leaving many voices unheard.

During my time at Beulah High School, I remember feeling this sense of hope and pride in the opportunity to participate in our fine democracy. This pride quickly soured into disappointment as I witnessed many upperclassmen give up their opportunity to vote in the 2020 election because they were stuck in class and did not want to risk being counted as absent. While I was lucky enough to vote by mail in my first election just this last November, I recognize that this is not the reality for many young adults.

With each election cycle, a new generation of voices emerges, and the passing of this bill would ensure that these voices are heard. This bill would help to remove barriers that could restrict many high school students from making it to the polls when they may not have been able to make it otherwise. It may also encourage a lot of high schoolers to take their civic duty more seriously by emphasizing the importance of their participation.

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HOUSE BILL NO. 1178
MARCH 6, 2025

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
SENATOR TODD BEARD, CHAIR

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY

MICHAEL HOWE, SECRETARY OF STATE

Chairman Beard and members of the committee, I am in full support of HB 1178. Participating in elections is a responsibility every eligible voter of the United States should carry. In the June 2024 Primary Election, we only had 20% of eligible North Dakotans participate. In the 2024 November General Election, we had 63% of eligible North Dakotans participate.

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I urge a Do Pass recommendation for HB 1178.



North Dakota House of Representatives

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Representative Anna Novak

District 33
1139 Elbowoods Drive
Hazen, ND 58545-4923
anovak@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Education
Energy and Natural Resources (Vice Chair)

March 5, 2025

Re: HB1178

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

For the record, my name is Anna Novak, Representative from District 33. Last spring, Zofia Dostal, a very ambitious senior from Beulah High School, approached me about sponsoring a bill idea that she had. We met locally and spoke about the bill, and then met with Legislative Council so she could see the process from start to finish. What you have before you is our finished product, HB1178.

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1. Not all counties in North Dakota have multiple polling locations. Where we live - Mercer County - we have one polling location, so it can take nearly an hour to get to that single polling location, depending upon where you live.
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3. Instead of coming up with a one-size fits all approach and mandating that different school districts follow the same policy, we decided to instruct each district to formulate their own voting policy. This approach allows us to keep the local control aspect that is important to our state.

Zofia Dostal is waiting to testify online to tell you about why this bill is important to her and to our state.

With that, I'm happy to stand for any questions the committee may have for me. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.