

Written Testimony for the
Senate Government and Veterans Affairs
January 21, 2021
Erika White, Burleigh County Election Manager



RE: SUPPORT for SB 2142

Good Morning, Chairman Vedaa, and members of the Committee. My name is Erika White and I am the Election Manager in the Burleigh County Auditor/Treasurer's office. I'm here this morning in support of SB 2142 which would extend the processing time of absentee ballots.

Currently, under state law, counties are allowed to begin processing absentee ballots the day before Election Day. While this has been an ample amount of time in the past, counties are seeing an increase in non-traditional voting methods such as voting early and absentee voting.

Burleigh County has seen increases in absentee voting over the past 4 election cycles. Between the 2014 and 2016 General Elections, we saw a 12% increase in absentee voting and a 22% increase between the 2016 and 2018 General Elections. We know 2020 was an unprecedented year but absentee voting increased 144% over the 2018 General Election.

As a majority of voters have experienced absentee voting and have grown more comfortable with the process, we expect our absentee quantities to continue to increase. We heard many comments from voters in the 2020 election cycle that praised the absentee process with many stating this is how they will continue to vote in future elections.

Processing absentee ballots is quite an undertaking. As voted ballots are returned to the Auditor's office, our staff scans the barcode on the outer/affidavit envelope, containing the ballot, into the Central Voter File as received. This marks the voter as "Voted" and that voter cannot cast another ballot at early vote or on Election Day. The outer/affidavit envelope is not opened at this time, but is

matched with the corresponding application, signatures are verified, and then alphabetized and stored in a secure location until the absentee board meets.

Prior to the absentee board meeting, our staff prints a roster of received absentee ballots. The roster includes voter information, in alphabetical order, and accompanies the corresponding envelopes, containing the ballots, for the absentee board to process. The absentee board then takes the roster and envelopes containing the ballots and one by one verifies that the roster and ballots equate.

Then, the absentee board verifies the signature from the application to the outer/affidavit envelope. After signatures are verified, the board will open and remove the ballot, in its secrecy envelope, from the outer/affidavit envelope. It is important to note here that the ballot is left inside in its secrecy envelope to maintain voter anonymity during this entire process. Once they have a good number of ballots, still in the secrecy envelope, they will remove the ballot from the secrecy envelope and initial the bottom of the ballot.

The ballots are then scanned by our central count scanner which is a high-throughput scanner meant to handle large quantities of ballots. Results from this scanner are not known or available until 7:00pm on Election Day when the results are allowed to be exported from the scanner. The only information the board and our office know prior to 7:00pm on Election Day is the ballot quantity scanned by the machine. We do not know the results of the absentee precinct until polls close on Election Day.

The absentee process is quite extensive and allowing for extra days in the verification of signatures and opening of ballots will ensure deliberate processes and procedures are followed, added security, and timely election results.

We are requesting one minor change to the language of the bill, on page 1 line 7, to three **BUSINESS** days instead of three calendar days. This minor change would allow counties across North Dakota to begin preparing absentee ballots for tabulation on the Friday prior to the Election, which county auditors agree would be very beneficial and would assist in the timely reporting of election results on

Election Night. You may hear today that there is no need to give extra time for processing as it just a matter of hiring enough election workers, but I'm here to testify that finding willing and qualified election workers is a struggle county auditors have each year, not to mention during a pandemic. Many counties, including Burleigh, struggled this year to find enough trained election workers, and we were no exception to what my colleagues around the state reported. Again this would allow for the preparation of the ballots for tabulating and we want to assure you that NO results are generated during this preparation period.

Thank you for your time today and I urge a DO PASS recommendation for SB 2142.

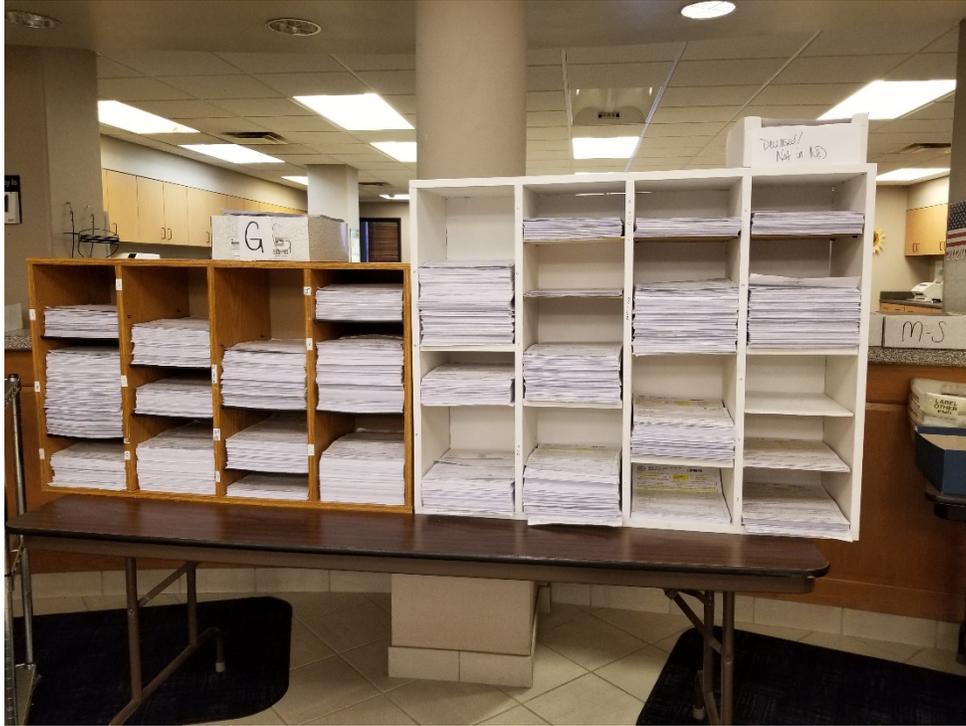


Batch 1



Batch 2

*The above pictures are batches 1 and 2 of 4 total batches for the election. Each batch (cart) contained approximately 6,000 ballots still in their outer/affidavit envelope with corresponding application.



*The above picture are the file sorters that stored the completed absentee applications filed in alphabetical order.



Burleigh County Ballot Progress



Picture depicts a portion of the ballots received

26,568 Ballots Mailed
12,438 Ballots Received

Staffing:

11 Employees
7 Temporary Employees

October 15, 2020