

Written Submission

on the 2025 Electoral Boundaries Commission Interim Report

Name/Nom N. L.

Date January 1, 2026

Submission/Message

Before turning to the specific options outlined by the Commission, I would like to offer some initial comments for context and consideration.

Concerns re: Electoral Boundaries Commission Terms of Reference

I'm troubled by the Terms of Reference issued by the Members of the 20th Legislative Assembly in October 2024, which set restrictive parameters for the Electoral Boundaries Commission's review. Requiring proposals for no fewer than 19 seats was an unreasonable constraint – one that appears driven by self-interest rather than what is best for the NWT. This restriction prevented consideration of reducing the size of the Assembly, despite compelling reasons to do so.

The Legislative Assembly has had 19 electoral districts since 1999, during which population growth has been minimal. Meanwhile, advances in communication – email, social media, videoconferencing, and cell phones – have made connecting with constituents easier than ever. Travel between communities is also less costly and more efficient than it once was. Even as a Yellowknife resident, I have never contacted an MLA except electronically. The need for regular in-person accessibility for effective representation in 2026 should not be overstated.

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The NWT has one of the lowest ratios of residents per MLA in Canada, even compared to jurisdictions with similarly vast and remote areas:

Jurisdiction	MLAs	Population	# of Residents per MLA
Quebec	125	8,501,833	68,015
Manitoba	57	1,342,153	23,547
Saskatchewan	61	1,266,234	20,758
Newfoundland	40	549,738	13,743
NWT	19	44,731	2,354
Yukon	21	46,948	2,236
Nunavut	22	36,858	1,675

The justification for maintaining this imbalance – or making it worse by adding electoral districts – is unclear. There is no evidence that more MLAs would improve representation in the NWT, especially given our limited candidate pool. Expanding the Assembly would increase costs without improving governance. Every additional MLA means more spending on salaries, benefits, pensions, offices, staff, and renovations – diverting funds from essential programs and services. The GNWT needs to do more with less. The Legislative Assembly should be expected to do the same. I cannot, in good conscience, recommend increasing the number of ridings and MLAs, as the Commission proposes in three of the four options.

Conversely, reducing the number of MLAs, an option that should have been available to the Commission, would not materially weaken representation for Indigenous or small-community residents. Indigenous governments now play a significant role in territorial governance, providing coordinated representation for residents of smaller communities – strong representation and political influence that municipal governments in the NWT do not get.

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The Commission is required to seek relative parity between electoral districts “to the extent possible, except where special circumstances warrant exceptional deviation.” This has not been achieved in the Commission’s proposals. Certain factors are being overemphasized while others are downplayed. Geographic, communication and transportation considerations could constitute “special circumstances” in some cases, but they no longer warrant the exceptional deviation they once did, when meetings were in-person, email did not exist, phone calls were expensive, and travel was less efficient. Technology does not merely assist “to some extent” in overcoming these challenges, as the Commission states. Rather, it does so to a large extent.

The reliance by the Legislative Assembly and the Commission on a $\pm 25\%$ variation standard seems misleading. Manitoba, for example, caps variation at $\pm 10\%$, with exceptions only for its northern region. Treating $\pm 25\%$ as acceptable undermines fairness. Aiming for ± 10 to 15% wherever possible would be far more reasonable. I am far more concerned about ridings being underrepresented than about a few being overrepresented.

Population size and growth projections – not just geography, cultural ties, and similar protectionist measures – are required by legislation to be considered to prevent underrepresentation. Migration to larger centers continues, and decisions must be forward-looking.

Yellowknife has been significantly underrepresented for as long as I can remember, however, and the Commission’s current proposals suggest this imbalance should be allowed to persist. While the proposed Hay River and Monfwi ridings have been given room to grow, not Yellowknife.

Overrepresenting small communities will not reverse the urbanization trend. If the Assembly insists on maintaining the imbalance between Yellowknife and most or all other communities, it should provide evidence that this approach effectively protects smaller communities. Fair representation should prioritize minimizing imbalances rather than attempting to maintain them at the expense of Yellowknife voters.

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If adopted, the proposed boundaries will likely require redrawing within a few years, creating instability and unnecessary costs. A clear commitment to reviewing boundaries more frequently as demographic changes demand is essential.

OPTION 1

Of all the options presented, I find Option 1 to be the least objectionable. However, I do believe it could be improved.

OPTION 1 – 19 Districts

Riding	# of Residents	Over/Under-Representation
Monfwi 2	1494	-36.5%
Monfwi 1	1531	-35.0%
Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh	1624	-31.0%
Nunakput	1950	-17.2%
Nahendeh	2201	-6.5%
Dehcho 2	2232	-5.2%
Dehcho 1	2277	-3.3%
Mackenzie Delta 1	2391	1.6%
Mackenzie Delta 2	2459	4.5%
Thebacha	2473	5.0%
Yellowknife 8	2536	7.7%
Yellowknife 5	2582	9.7%
Sahtu	2585	9.8%
Yellowknife 1	2647	12.4%
Yellowknife 3	2665	13.2%
Yellowknife 7	2708	15.0%
Yellowknife 4	2716	15.4%
Yellowknife 6	2775	17.9%
Yellowknife 2	2884	22.5%

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I agree with merging Mackenzie Delta with the two Inuvik ridings and combining Dehcho with the two Hay River districts.

While I support adding another, long overdue riding to Yellowknife and redrawing its internal boundaries, I strongly oppose the proposal – present in all four options – to include the Ingraham Trail in Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh. All Yellowknife ridings should encompass the city and its surrounding areas to the greatest extent possible. Yellowknife and the Ingraham Trail clearly form a community of interest, given that the economic, social, and infrastructure interests of most residents of the Ingraham Trail are closely tied to Yellowknife.

Moreover, the Commission's proposal to absorb the Ingraham Trail within Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh raises concerns in light of past interest expressed by some MLAs in having all cabin leases around Yellowknife transferred from the federal and territorial governments to the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. Such a move by the Commission or Legislative Assembly would introduce unnecessary complications to an already sensitive situation, particularly given recent court decisions on Aboriginal title and private property rights and the GNWT's emphasis on reconciliation. Including the Ingraham Trail within a Yellowknife riding would be a much more logical and cohesive approach.

While I support splitting the current Monfwi riding, I am concerned that this option results in Monfwi and Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh deviating significantly from the representation standard applied to other ridings. The acceptable population range is supposed to be between 1,765 and 2,943 residents, yet the proposed deviations fall far below the lower threshold. The rationale provided in the report does not appear to meet the standard of "special circumstances" that would justify such an exceptional deviation.

To address these disparities, I recommend dissolving Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh and redistributing its communities among the Monfwi, Yellowknife, or Thebacha ridings based on shared interests and governance linkages, in consultation with the affected communities. This adjustment could reduce the total number of seats to 18, which is both reasonable, more cost-effective and better able to achieve parity of representation than the NWT's current 19 seats.

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VARIATION ON OPTION 1 – 18 Districts

Riding	# of Residents	Over/Under-Representation
Nunakput	1950	-21.6%
Monfwi 2	TBD	TBD
Monfwi 1	TBD	TBD
Nahendeh	2201	-11.4%
Dehcho 2	2232	-10.2%
Dehcho 1	2277	-8.4%
Mackenzie Delta 1	2391	-3.7%
Mackenzie Delta 2	2459	-1.0%
Sahtu	2585	4.0%
Thebacha	TBD	TBD
Yellowknife 8	TBD	TBD
Yellowknife 5	TBD	TBD
Yellowknife 1	TBD	TBD
Yellowknife 3	2665	7.2%
Yellowknife 7	2708	8.9%
Yellowknife 4	2716	9.3%
Yellowknife 6	2775	11.7%
Yellowknife 2	2884	16.1%

OPTIONS 2 and 3

I do not support Option 2 or Option 3 and can find little, if anything, redeeming about either approach. The population variation across ridings is far too substantial to take either proposal seriously. For example, there are discrepancies of approximately 1,300 to 1,400 residents between each of Monfwi 1, Monfwi 2, and Nahendeh in contrast to some Yellowknife ridings, and nearly 1,200 more residents in Yellowknife's ridings compared to Hay River's ridings. Under both options, Yellowknife's eight ridings would continue to be significantly underrepresented.

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OPTION 2 – 20 Districts

Riding	# of Residents	Over/Under-Representation
Monfwi 2	1494	-33.2%
Nahendeh	1517	-32.2%
Monfwi 1	1531	-31.5%
Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh	1624	-27.4%
Hay River North	1696	-24.2%
Hay River South	1744	-22.0%
Dehcho	1754	-21.6%
Nunakput	1950	-12.8%
Mackenzie Delta 1	2391	6.9%
Mackenzie Delta 2	2459	9.9%
Thebacha	2473	10.6%
Yellowknife 8	2536	13.4%
Yellowknife 5	2582	15.4%
Sahtu	2585	15.6%
Yellowknife 1	2647	18.4%
Yellowknife 3	2665	19.2%
Yellowknife 7	2708	21.1%
Yellowknife 4	2716	21.4%
Yellowknife 6	2775	24.1%
Yellowknife 2	2884	28.9%

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OPTION 3 – 21 Districts

Riding	# of Residents	Over/Under-Representation
Monfwi 2	1495	-29.8%
Nahendeh	1517	-28.8%
Monfwi 1	1531	-28.1%
Mackenzie Delta	1568	-26.4%
Tu Nedhe-Willideh	1624	-23.8%
Inuvik Twin Lakes	1636	-23.2%
Inuvik Boot Lake	1646	-22.7%
Hay River North	1696	-20.4%
Hay River South	1744	-18.1%
Dehcho	1754	-17.7%
Nunakput	1950	-8.5%
Thebacha	2473	16.1%
Yellowknife 8	2536	19.1%
Yellowknife 5	2582	21.2%
Sahtu	2585	21.4%
Yellowknife 1	2647	24.3%
Yellowknife 3	2665	25.1%
Yellowknife 7	2708	27.1%
Yellowknife 4	2716	27.5%
Yellowknife 6	2775	30.3%
Yellowknife 2	2884	35.4%

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OPTION 4

For the reasons stated earlier, I cannot support Option 4, which would grow the Legislative Assembly without any justification that I can see, while shifting the huge discrepancies among ridings. Voters in Thebacha, Sahtu, and Yellowknife would be vastly underrepresented compared with voters in Monfwi, Nahendeh, and even urban centers like Hay River and Inuvik. How is it justified for there to be 1,090 more residents in the Sahtu and 456 more residents in Nunakput than in Monfwi 1, for example, or for a Yellowknife riding to have 837 more residents than Hay River North?

Option 4 also significantly reduces the average number of residents per MLA, to only 2,033 residents, when there is nothing indicating that the workloads of current MLAs are too heavy. This proposal makes no sense when looking at the various considerations for electoral boundaries.

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OPTION 4 – 22 Districts

Riding	# of Residents	Over/Under-Representation
Monfwi 2	1495	-26.5%
Nahendeh	1517	-25.4%
Monfwi 1	1531	-24.7%
Mackenzie Delta	1568	-22.9%
Tu Nedhe-Willideh	1624	-20.1%
Inuvik Twin Lakes	1636	-19.5%
Inuvik Boot Lake	1646	-19.0%
Hay River North	1696	-16.6%
Hay River South	1744	-14.2%
Dehcho	1754	-13.7%
Nunakput	1950	-4.1%
Yellowknife 8	2139	5.2%
Yellowknife 1	2217	9.0%
Yellowknife 3	2334	14.8%
Yellowknife 9	2400	18.0%
Yellowknife 6	2450	20.5%
Yellowknife 5	2464	21.2%
Thebacha	2473	21.6%
Yellowknife 2	2485	22.2%
Yellowknife 4	2490	22.5%
Yellowknife 7	2533	24.6%
Sahtu	2585	27.1%

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ALTERNATIVE – 14 Districts

Regardless of the Terms of Reference, I recommend reducing the number of MLAs to something like 14, resulting in an average of 3,195 residents per district, with an “acceptable deviation” of ± 799 , ranging from 2,396 to 3,994 residents. This would address the most egregious cases of over and underrepresentation, while reflecting population trends, community and cultural ties, geographic realities, and the politics of smaller communities vs. Yellowknife.

Notably, this would bring the variance among larger centers (Fort Smith, Hay River and Yellowknife) in closer proximity. Yellowknife ridings would still be comparatively underrepresented, accounting for their geographic advantage, but this approach would achieve representation more reflective of the fact that Yellowknife is currently home to very close to half of the NWT's total population.

If this approach were taken, I would suggest maintaining Nunakput, Sahtu, and Monfwi, as is, while merging or redefining the remaining ridings as set out below:

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Riding	# of Residents	Over/Under-Representation
Nunakput	1927	-39%
Sahtu	2559	-19%
Part of Mackenzie Delta with one of two redefined Inuvik ridings	2338 to 2780	-12% to -26%
Part of Mackenzie Delta with one of two redefined Inuvik ridings	2338 to 2780	-12% to -26%
Part of Dehcho (e.g., Fort Providence) with Nahendeh	2780	-12%
Monfwi	3033	-4%
Part of Dehcho (e.g., Kakisa and Enterprise) with a combined Hay River riding	3443	9%
Lutselk'e and Fort Resolution with Thebacha	3349	6%
N'Dilo and Dettah with one of six redefined Yellowknife ridings (e.g., Ingraham Trail, Old Town and School Draw areas)	3506 to 3664	11% to 16%
One of six Yellowknife ridings	3506 to 3664	11% to 16%
One of six Yellowknife ridings	3506 to 3664	11% to 16%
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Additional Comments

First, the current approach in the Terms of Reference and taken by the Commission prioritizes political convenience over fiscal responsibility and effective representation. Future processes should be cost-conscious and more transparent and inclusive. All future Terms of Reference should require cost estimates for proposals. When voting on Commission recommendations, the Legislative Assembly should be bound by the same factors the Commission is required to consider, and cost must factor into its decisions.

Public input should be required on future Terms of Reference and should be prioritized when amending the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. I'm concerned there was inadequate public engagement on Bill 76: An Act to Amend the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act during the 19th Assembly, which moved from First Reading (March 9, 2023) to Assent (March 31, 2023) – an alarming pace for legislation central to democracy and, it looks like, without a public hearing after Second Reading.

Had I known of the bill, I would have proposed changes to the Commission's composition. Its current structure invites self-interest, with all members but the chair being hand-picked by current MLAs. Future commissions should include objective third parties by virtue of their office, such as the NWT Chief Justice, Chief Judge, Chief Electoral Officer, and the President of Aurora College, possibly along with one or two public members recommended by the Assembly.

Finally, given potential conflicts of interest among current MLAs, I urge that all votes by the 20th Assembly on the Commission's final recommendations be recorded.

Finally, I do not support the slate concept proposed by some other respondents. It would create an unmanageable workload for Yellowknife MLAs and candidates, who would be responsible for 21,372 constituents – obviously far more than any other riding. While this approach is used for municipal elections, it makes it difficult for candidates to reach voters and for residents to get timely responses from elected officials.