

Written Submission

on the 2025 Electoral Boundaries Commission Interim Report

Name/Nom David Wasylciw

Date January 12, 2026

Submission/Message

Re: Submission on the 2025 Interim Report Electoral Boundaries Review

Dear Members of the Commission,

I am writing to provide input on the 2025 Interim Report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. The data presented in the report clearly demonstrate that current electoral boundaries produce significant inequities, particularly in urban districts, and warrant immediate and thoughtful adjustment.

Population Disparities Demand Action

The territorial population of 44,731 results in an average of approximately 2,354 residents per electoral district under the 19 seat model. However, several urban districts significantly exceed this average: Yellowknife North has 4,081 residents (+73.4%), Kam Lake has 3,473 (+47.5%), Yellowknife Centre has 3,029 (+28.7%), and Monfwi has 3,063 (+30.1%). In contrast, several rural districts are markedly underpopulated: Dehcho has 1,113 residents (-52.7%), Tu Nedhé Wiilideh 1,381 (-41.3%), Inuvik Twin Lakes 1,487 (-36.8%), and Mackenzie Delta 1,568 (-33.4%).

These discrepancies are not minor. A resident of Yellowknife North has approximately 3.7 times less voting power than a resident of Dehcho. Such disparities directly challenge the principle of equitable representation and the effectiveness of our democratic institutions. As the Commission's report notes, 10 of the current 19 electoral districts have a variance of greater than 25% (the threshold that courts have found to be presumptively constitutional).

Assessment of the Commission's Options

I have reviewed each of the four options presented in the Interim Report. While all represent genuine efforts to address the representational imbalance, they differ

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substantially in how well they achieve voter parity.

Option 4 (22 districts) comes closest to achieving the constitutional standard of effective representation. Under this model, all but three districts fall within the $\pm 25\%$ variance threshold, and even those exceptions (Sahtu, Nahendeh, and the proposed Monfwi 2) are justifiable based on the exceptional circumstances the Commission has identified, including geographic isolation, shared land claims, and cultural coherence. This option most faithfully honours the principle that every citizen's vote should carry roughly equal weight.

I recognize, however, that Option 4 may be politically unpalatable for MLAs. The Legislative Assembly has historically been reluctant to add seats, and adding three new districts represents a significant expansion. Yet, the Commission's own analysis demonstrates that half measures will not resolve the underlying problem. Option 3 (21 districts), while preferable to the status quo, still leaves five of eight Yellowknife districts underrepresented by more than 25%, with an effective range of over 65% between the most and least populous districts.

Options 1 and 2 require difficult trade-offs that diminish representation for some communities. Merging Mackenzie Delta with Inuvik, or Dehcho with Hay River, may achieve numerical parity but risks diluting the distinct voices of smaller communities within larger regional centres.

My recommendation is that the Commission endorse Option 4 in its final report. If the Legislative Assembly ultimately rejects a 22 seat model, Option 3 represents an acceptable compromise, though it should be understood as a step toward, rather than a resolution of, the representational imbalance.

On the Question of Cost

I am aware that past boundary reviews have foundered on concerns about the cost of additional seats. The Commission's report rightly notes that cost is not among the factors it is mandated to consider, nor is it a factor recognized under Charter jurisprudence as justifying deviations from voter parity.

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Nevertheless, political realities matter. When this Commission's recommendations come before the Legislative Assembly, MLAs will weigh the fiscal implications. I would encourage the Commission to address this directly in its final report by noting two points. First, Yukon, with a similar population, has adopted 21 districts, and Nunavut, with a smaller population, operates with 22. The NWT is not being asked to pioneer an untested expansion. Second, the cost of inaction is not zero. Continued constitutional vulnerability invites litigation, as the Friends of Democracy case demonstrated in 1999. The expense of defending boundaries that fail to meet Charter standards, or of conducting yet another review after the Assembly rejects modest reforms, may well exceed the incremental cost of additional seats.

Fair representation is not a luxury - it is a constitutional obligation. The modest investment required to add two or three seats is justified by the legitimacy it confers on our democratic institutions.

An Alternative Approach: Multi-Member Urban Districts

I understand that the Commission has a narrow mandate to review the number, boundaries, and names of single member electoral districts. What I propose in this section falls outside that core mandate, and I raise it not as a formal recommendation for this review, but as an idea that deserves consideration in the broader conversation about democratic reform in the Northwest Territories.

The current configuration of single member urban districts creates artificial boundaries that divide cohesive communities and limit voter choice. Multi-member districts, in which electors use a ranked ballot to select multiple representatives, offer a principled alternative for urban centres like Yellowknife, Hay River, and Inuvik. This approach reduces arbitrary division, allows voters to elect representatives who better reflect the diversity and density of urban populations, and is consistent with how municipal and education body elections already operate in many jurisdictions where the municipality is not divided into arbitrary wards.

I recognize that Commissions such as this one have historically operated within similar limitations, and that recommendations are often set aside by the Legislature regardless of their scope. I would urge Commissioners to consider, in their final report, whether

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broadening the scope of your recommendations, or at least noting that alternative electoral models warrant future study, might serve the public interest. New ideas and new ways to improve governance always have a place, even if they cannot be implemented through this particular process.

Respect for Community Integrity

Whatever option the Commission recommends, I urge that all boundary adjustments respect the integrity of communities, including Indigenous governance structures, language regions, and patterns of social and economic interaction. The Commission's attention to land claims, self-government agreements, and communities of interest is commendable and must remain central to the final recommendations. Effective representation is only meaningful if residents can engage with MLAs who understand and reflect the character and needs of their communities.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence presented in the 2025 Interim Report, I urge the Commission to:

1. Recommend Option 4 (22 seats) as the model that best achieves voter parity and effective representation, while acknowledging the political challenges it may face.
2. Identify Option 3 (21 seats) as an acceptable alternative if the Legislative Assembly is unwilling to adopt a 22 seat model.
3. Address cost concerns directly, noting comparisons with Yukon and Nunavut and the costs of continued constitutional vulnerability.
4. Consider noting in the final report that alternative electoral models, including multi-member urban districts, warrant future study by the Legislative Assembly.
5. Ensure that all boundary adjustments respect community integrity and Indigenous governance structures.

Thank you for considering these views as you finalize your recommendations.