

Presentation by the
**Association of
Manitoba
Municipalities**



to

The Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs
Bill 29: The Municipal Councils and School
Boards Elections Act

Monday, June 6, 2005

On behalf of Manitoba municipalities, I am pleased to appear before this committee today to outline the Association of Manitoba Municipalities' position on Bill 29: The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act.

The success of a democratic system hinges on the election process and it is essential that the legislation that regulates this process meets the needs of the citizens. Right now the process for electing Manitoba's municipal governments and school boards is governed by an outdated act. The AMM has been urging the Provincial Government for some time to review this antiquated act and to bring it into the new century. For this reason we are pleased to see Bill 29 introduced and pleased to have the opportunity to put our comments on this bill on the public record.

In discussing this issue with our membership (all 199 incorporated municipalities in Manitoba), it became evident that the needs are very different across the Province. The City of Winnipeg, which is appearing before this committee today, and smaller villages and rural municipalities have very different wants and needs when it comes to the election process. For this reason, we are pleased to see a great deal of flexibility built into the proposed act. The legislation governing elections in this province must facilitate the election process for all municipalities, big and small, and the only way to accomplish this is to allow municipal governments the flexibility to tailor policies based on the needs of local communities.

A prime example of this is the flexibility to allow for the use of vote counting machines. In the City of Winnipeg, with a total population of almost 620,000 people, it makes absolute sense to use any system that makes the counting of ballots easier. The costs of attaining this technology will no doubt be offset by the time saved. However, the need for such equipment is not the same in a smaller Village or Town with a population of only 1,000 people. If they were forced to use this type of technology the costs would be crippling. We are therefore supportive of legislation that allows municipalities to use the systems that are most appropriate for local needs.

This review was limited however, as the proposed Act does not delve into the more complex issues of electoral and candidate qualifications, and a review of these important issues will need to be undertaken at some point. While this current revision of the Act addresses only the administrative and procedural issues, it will make the election process easier to administer through straightforward language and simplified rules. With the enhanced flexibility, our association believes the changes made in this new Act meet the needs of local governments.