



RE: SB 261 Possession of Firearm at Polling Place – NMBC Opposes

Chair and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the New Mexico Business Coalition (NMBC), I write in opposition to Senate Rules Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 261.

SB 261 amends Section 1-20-24 NMSA 1978 to eliminate longstanding exemptions that allow certified and commissioned law enforcement officers to carry firearms at polling places while performing official duties. While the substitute permits officers to be present when specifically requested by certain election officials, it removes the broader exemption that allows officers acting within the scope of their professional responsibilities to carry their standard-issue firearm.

This change raises serious public safety concerns.

New Mexico continues to struggle with violent crime and law enforcement shortages. Polling places must be orderly, secure environments for voters, election workers, and volunteers. The visible presence of trained, armed law enforcement officers serves as a deterrent to intimidation, disruption, or potential violence. Limiting officers' authority to carry their standard equipment unless formally requested creates confusion, delays response capability, and increases risk.

In an emergency, seconds matter. Law enforcement officers should not be placed in a position where statutory ambiguity interferes with their ability to respond immediately and effectively. Nor should they be required to navigate a patchwork of permission requirements to perform their sworn duties.

Election integrity includes physical security. Voters must feel safe entering and exiting polling places. Election workers must know that trained professionals are equipped and prepared to protect them if necessary.

SB 261 does not strengthen confidence in our elections; it weakens practical security safeguards that are already in place. At a time when public trust and safety are paramount, New Mexico should be reinforcing—not restricting—the tools available to law enforcement officers tasked with protecting our communities.

For these reasons, NMBC respectfully urges a NO vote on Senate Bill 261.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carla J. Sonntag".

Carla J. Sonntag
President & CEO