

House Bill 1366
Testimony before House Transportation Committee
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Steve Zaun, and I am the General Manager of Puklich Chevrolet in Bismarck and Puklich Chevrolet Buick GMC in Valley City. I am here in support of HB 1366. The issue of abandonment has unfortunately increased in recent years, becoming an expensive issue for business owners and, subsequently, the customers using our services.

We do our best to provide exceptional service to the motoring public, our customers, in an effort to keep their transportation safe and reliable. It is our practice to repair a vehicle in good faith when the customer makes the request. We provide cost estimates before we proceed and repair a vehicle only after a customer gives us permission to perform the repair. A great majority of our customers pay their bill. However, some do not and instead choose to abandon the vehicle at our facilities. Most of these customers cut off all communications with us, making it difficult to do anything to collect the repair bill or take action to foreclose on our repairman's lien.

Last year, we had a situation where a customer owed us several thousand dollars on a repair. Between the time the repair was authorized and when it was completed, the customer quit his job and made the decision to move back to his home state of Texas. This particular customer did stay in contact with us for a while, assuring us that he was trying to make it right. After several months of working with this customer, he finally admitted he didn't want to pay the bill because he did not feel it was worth it to come back to ND to get the vehicle. He promised to send the title but never did and then he simply stopped communicating with us. We next reached out to the lienholder and informed them that we had the vehicle and, if they would like to reclaim it, they would need to pay our repair bill. The lender informed us that they were not interested in the collateral as its value didn't make it worth their costs and effort to reclaim it. Thus, the lender decided to abandon the vehicle as well.

Last summer, we also had a situation with an abandoned vehicle that created potential liability for our company and employees. It was discovered that a person had broken into one of these cars and was sleeping in it at night. We had to have the Bismarck Police physically remove this person several times before the person finally stopped coming back. We had several frightened employees that observed this person early in the morning when coming in before dawn to do their job.

Many dealers could recite numerous cases like the two I mentioned today. We do our best to take care of our driving public in the most customer-friendly way possible. I support this bill as it gives us a better path to dispose of these abandoned vehicles while, at the same time, protecting the rights of our customers, other lienholders, and the citizens of our great state.

I thank you for your time today and your consideration of this crucial legislation. I urge you to please support HB 1366.

Steve Zaun
Puklich Chevrolet Inc.