



January 22, 2021

Senator Holmberg and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee,

I am writing today to ask you to consider Governor Burgum's recommendation to increase the Tourism Division's budget, as well as the additional \$2 million in one-time funding for destination marketing from the general fund and the \$200,000 for brand extension and visitor services enhancements.

Tourism has always played a vital role to the State of ND bringing in "new money" to the state and helping to retain the revenue to distribute to other entities around the state through state budgets, but it is needed now more than ever. The pandemic has diminished travel and made some weary of planning meetings or traveling for work. North Dakota has the prime stance to gain visitors to our state for leisure travel because of our wide-open spaces. Social distancing will be key in gaining the momentum back, and we have just what they need. But in order to gain the economic impact, we need to make sure North Dakota Tourism has the tools in their toolbox to get our face in front of those traveling... and that takes money.

The Tourism Division of the Department of Commerce is a strong Economic Development partner because they present the "image of North Dakota" to also help us grow our state as a place to do business. The Tourism Division's staff have done a great job marketing our state on a small budget but as our competing state's marketing dollars increase, it is getting harder and harder for North Dakota to stay on track.

Local cities and attractions could not be as successful without the help from the state's Tourism Division. The advertising efforts, reach and other programs they provide to the local entities are important for us to acquire the needed travelers to our areas. We partner with the state on many programs such as the Travel Show program and other advertising campaigns/promotions. As a small CVB with a very small budget, we would not be able to advertise in some of these markets without the help of the state Tourism Division. The data that is provided to us is vital in learning more about our visitors and potential visitors and in evaluating our own efforts. All of our communities rely on the ND Department of Tourism as our resource for such information. As an example, if you take the time to look through their 2021 media plan you will see that they are heavily investing in the Chicago and Minneapolis markets. I can tell you for a fact that their media push helps my small community of Devils Lake because Chicago and the Minneapolis market are by far the largest visitors to my area of the state. Our cities need the help from the state Tourism Division to make us succeed and stay viable communities.

Advertising costs are on the rise and technology is advancing. It is vital to the state of North Dakota that the Tourism Division keep up with trends and stay competitive. The ND Tourism budget is already underfunded. Any cuts to the department would put us further behind our competitors. I encourage you and your committee to support the tourism portion of SB2018 for at least the ask, but would urge you to consider more. It has been proven that tourism marketing dollars come back to the state in significant multiples.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Suzie Kenner".

Suzie Kenner  
Executive Director