

TESTIMONY OF
ALAN S. DOHRMANN
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES
BEFORE THE 57TH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MARCH 29, 2021

Madam Chair and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, my name is Al Dohrmann. I am the Director of the Department of Emergency Services for the state of North Dakota. As the officer charged with executing emergency responses under Chapter 37-17.1, I appear today to provide some brief comments and stand for any questions the committee may have of me or my agency.

In times of crisis, it is important to have clear authorities, predictability, and empowered leaders from the frontline incident commander, through the Unified Command to the Chief Executive. Any ambiguity in this process or authority needs to be removed to ensure we can provide the right resource at the right time to stay ahead of our competition, whether that is mother nature, an invisible virus, or a thinking competitor.

I am aware of three bills introduced this session that address the Governor's and/or the State Health Officer's authorities during emergencies – SB 2124, HB 1495 and the bill before us today, HB 1118. As an agency, we have been in opposition of both SB 2124 and HB 1495 because we believe they would introduce a level of ambiguity to the process that could put federal funding, lives, and property at risk. Of the three Bills, HB 1118 is the most narrowly drafted and provides the most clarity and predictability that is so important in times of crisis.

With that said, as an agency, the Department of Emergency Services does not see a need for a change in our Disaster Act. Chapter 37-17.1 has served our state and citizens well over the last 30 years that I have been associated with the North Dakota National Guard and the Department of Emergency Services. From the historic floods of 1997, 2009 and 2011, to the pipeline protest in 1996 to 1997, to this pandemic. It seems to me we have laws on the books now that provide what we all seek, clear authority that puts the executive branch and political sub-division in the best possible position to protect lives and property. Therefore, we should be very deliberate in any changes we make and ensure they are based on fact and informed by subject matter experts, not based on the emotions of the time.

I'm here today with Mr. Cody Schulz, the Deputy Director of Emergency Services, to answer any questions you may have and help ensure HB 1118 is informed by fact and and the people assigned the responsibility execute a crisis response under Chapter 37-17.1.

I would be pleased to stand for your questions.