



WESTERN DAKOTA ENERGY ASSOCIATION

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January 11, 2023

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Testimony of:

Geoff Simon, Lobbyist #144
in support of HB 1129
House Political Subdivisions Committee

Chairman Longmuir and Committee members:

On behalf of the city, county and school district members of the Western Dakota Energy Association (WDEA), we wish to express support for House Bill 1129 to exempt rural fire and ambulance districts from fees imposed by the state auditor. Recent cases indicate the fees have been excessive, and place a disproportionate burden on rural fire/ambulance districts, potentially depriving the citizens they serve of essential life-saving emergency medical assistance and protection of their private property.

One example of which I'm aware is a recent audit of the Killdeer Area Ambulance District. Although the district has an annual budget of just over \$1 million, it was assessed fees of nearly \$50,000 for an audit performed by the state auditor's office. That amount doesn't include lost time incurred by district employees who were compelled to spend dozens of hours producing records required to perform the audit, time which could have been put to more productive use.

Rural fire/ambulance districts in sparsely populated areas have meager taxing ability to support operations, so are constantly seeking and applying for various state and federal grants to support the vital emergency services they deliver. Their financial struggles are compounded by the fact that the majority of ambulance trips are provided to seniors and low income citizens, for which Medicaid and Medicare typically reimburse less than half of the actual cost of providing ambulance service.

WDEA urges your strong support of HB 1129, which will allow rural districts to avoid the exorbitant fees associated with the state-mandate biannual audits.

Thank you for your consideration.

Western Dakota Energy Association
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