

**TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE 68th LEGISLATIVE SESSION
SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
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IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 2016**

Chairman Sorvaag, members of the Senate Appropriations Education and Environment Committee Division, my name is Greg Hoffman and I am the Interim Chief Information Officer (CIO) for the North Dakota Information Technology Department (NDIT). I am here today to testify in support of the Watch Center concept in Senate Bill 2016.

As the Interim Chief Information Officer for the state, I am here to endorse the establishment of a 24/7 state watch center on the basis that the watch center establishes a new capability to improve intelligence-sharing, incident response, and proactive identification of threats to state and private sector networks, whether caused by adversaries or natural disasters. A watch center can also synchronize efforts when computer networks are used to create problems for non-STAGEnet lifeline services in our state. For example, many states have had to deal with Swatting. This is basically a fake 911 call used to disperse first responders and police to a location that they are not needed. The watch center can help with this and ensure resources are available where needed and not tied up on fake response calls.

NDIT has expertise in identifying and responding to cyber threats but does not offer support directly to private sector organizations. The watch center can fill this gap by providing assistance during statewide emergencies and coordinating responses to large-scale events that impact public, private, and non-profit businesses. The watch center will act as the primary point of communication between NDIT and the North Dakota State & Local Intelligence Center (NDSLIC) to ensure a coordinated response.

A watch center will provide a central hub for identifying and coordinating responses to non-cyber incidents that may affect the state's network, such as power outages, floods, and physical attacks on network infrastructure.

This center will provide a proactive approach to gathering information about all potential threats, including cyber, that are occurring in private business and will facilitate a more coordinated response to any incidents that do occur. Furthermore, this center will serve as a hub for communication and coordination among state agencies, municipalities, and other partners. This will ensure that all parties are informed and working together to respond to large-scale incidents, which will further minimize the impact on victimized entities. It is crucial that we have a dedicated team in place to monitor for potential threats and organize an effective response quickly to incidents around the clock. watch center will ensure that we are able to gather and share information among stakeholders in real-time and act accordingly.

I want to be clear, that NDIT remains the lead agency in responding to threats against all of STAGEnet and continues to monitor and respond to thousands of attacks daily. Where NDIT is limited, is in that it is not staffed to proactively monitor for natural hazards or adversarial physical threats. A coordinated effort between NDIT, the NDSLIC, and the watch center that maximizes the strength of each group while removing duplication of effort is essential.

We have also worked closely on statewide disaster recovery planning and participated in Operation Staple Puller. This coordination has been key to the successful planning and preparation for any type of statewide power outage that could impact both public and private operations.

In conclusion, as the state's IT agency, we strongly endorse the establishment of a 24/7 state watch center. The watch center will enable better preparedness and protection of state networks by identifying, assessing and notifying NDIT of threats to the infrastructure we rely on. It will also enhance communication and coordination among state agencies, municipalities, private sector infrastructure owners, and first responders in the event of a statewide cyber incident or disaster that impacts our network. Overall, the establishment of this center will greatly enhance the state's ability to protect and serve its citizens. I thank you for your support and the opportunity to testify before the committee today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.