



SENATE BILL NO. 2018
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS – EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT DIVISION COMMITTEE
MIKE NATHE, CHAIR
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL NO. 2018

Chairman Nathe and Member of the Committee: My name is Sheri Grossman. It is my privilege to be the CEO for the Bismarck-Mandan Convention & Visitors Bureau. I am also the President of Destination Marketing Association of North Dakota (DMAND). DMAND is a cooperative association of independent Convention and Visitor Bureaus, as well as additional communities who share a broad-based community support and whose primary objective is the promotion of North Dakota.

You have all seen the compelling data from the ND Tourism Division showing you the impact visitors have on our state. People are going to travel. They will go somewhere; we need to have the funding to inspire them to choose North Dakota. If not, we are letting other states reap the benefits of the economic impact that could benefit our state.

Unfortunately, our neighboring states have always had much larger budgets than our Tourism Division; the most alarming part is that the gap is growing substantially. It is critical that our Tourism Division has adequate funding to compete with neighboring states. We cannot continue to let our neighbors capture these visitors and risk losing the economic impact that they could have on North Dakota. It is imperative to attract this business to fill our hotels, restaurants, gas stations, and stores. They also generate a significant amount of tax that is needed by the local municipalities in every county. In 2023, visitors paid \$307M in state and local taxes.

In addition to marketing to get visitors here, we need to have adequate offerings to aid in enticement and increase the length of stay. Thank you so much for appropriating money for the Destination Development Grants last session. This session, SB 2018 comes to you with a reduction of funding to \$20 million. We respectfully ask you to consider amending the bill to at least match last session's \$25 million. As you know, there was no shortage of worthy projects. The Bismarck-Mandan Convention & Visitors Bureau pledged \$500,000 towards the Riverfront Festival Grounds that was selected to receive a grant. This project, like the others that were awarded, will increase the length of stay for visitors. The more unique offerings that we can provide, the more visitors will want to come to North Dakota and extend their time exploring our beautiful state. Walking along the boardwalk overlooking the Missouri River is going to be a memorable experience. Projects like this will also help to attract new residents to our state to experience our quality of life and join our workforce. It is so exciting to see the results when State Government and other organizations work together.

Sara and her team do a remarkable job showing a return on investment with every dollar that is entrusted with them. I hope you will make the commitment to invest our state's resources in the Tourism Division a priority. All of North Dakota will reap the benefits.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.