



Chairman Nathe and members of the House Appropriations Education and Environment Division,

On behalf of Visit Greater Grand Forks, I urge you to support critical amendments to SB 2018, specifically regarding the Tourism and Marketing Division of the Department of Commerce:

- Increase the Destination Development Grant Program to at least \$25 million.
- Raise the \$7 million appropriated for marketing to \$10 million.
- Ensure ongoing marketing funding as part of the Commerce annual budget, rather than a one-time allocation.

We were ecstatic when the House Appropriations Education and Environment Division allocated \$25 million for the Destination Development Grants in the last session. This investment is vital for developing amenities that benefit both visitors and residents. Unfortunately, due to overwhelming demand, Grand Forks did not receive funding from the last program. Ongoing funding will empower the entire state to enhance our offerings, something we at Visit Greater Grand Forks cannot achieve alone without your partnership. I strongly encourage you to support increasing the Destination Development Grant Program to at least \$25 million.

North Dakota is consistently outspent by neighboring states in marketing, creating an uneven playing field. Since the onset of COVID-19, we hear more travelers and locals expressing their appreciation for North Dakota's openness and safety. The last few years have posed challenges for us to rebuild, and we continue to rely heavily on programs provided by Tourism and Marketing. For example, in 2024, our collaboration with the state brought influencers to Grand Forks, leading to a PBS feature on *Travels with Darley*. Our collective efforts with Minot and Devils Lake to promote Highway 2 will culminate in a dedicated episode airing in early 2026. It is imperative to increase marketing funding from \$7 million to \$10 million to maintain and expand these initiatives.

Moreover, the success of our efforts is hindered without guaranteed ongoing funding for Tourism & Marketing. The uncertainty of one-time funding jeopardizes our ability to plan and innovate. A stable budget is essential to develop effective programs and initiatives that promote our state consistently.

Travel and tourism are vital to our economy, ranking as the third-largest industry in North Dakota. Local businesses thrive thanks to our promotional efforts. For instance, when the Alerus Center hosted the Zach Bryan concert, hotel occupancy soared to 89% and 90% each night, resulting in a staggering 283% increase in total room revenue and an economic

impact of \$12.3 million—demonstrating that most attendees were from out of town. Travel is tourism, and tourism is beneficial for North Dakota.

I implore you to support the proposed amendments and welcome the opportunity for further discussions on this critical matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

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