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Members of the North Dakota House of Representatives Finance and Taxation Committee

As a rural resident and pastor I encourage you to support SB 2228 to enhance the ability of small rural communities to support local grocery stores.

I grew up on small town Main Street in Garrison, North Dakota where my siblings and I worked in a family-owned variety store, a local department store, locally owned grocery stores, the movie theater, and eating establishments. I have served as a pastor in north central North Dakota since 1996 (Rolette-Bisbee-Willow City, Rugby-Knox, currently Anamoose-Drake-McClusky). I value these communities, their people, schools, and small businesses. I've watched small town schools close and rural businesses lose ground to all kinds of economic and cultural forces. Funding SB 2228 can provide tools to resist the further decline of rural communities. Values other than market efficiency deserve support.

These communities are good places to raise families, engage in agriculture and agribusiness, step back from social media, and focus on family and relationships. A local grocery store provides jobs, work experience, access to food for locals who are not all able to or don't want to be on the road or web for everything.

The City of Drake experienced the closure of its grocery store last fall, for the second time in the last 6 years. I am currently working with a local group to restore a grocery business to the community. We know that it will not be able to provide a return for a local investor so we are looking more to a community service model for the benefit of our low-income and elderly residents in addition to the community in general. While not eligible for funding under the current language of the bill, we hope to see eligibility expanded. Regardless, we recognize the need in small communities for this type of support.

North Dakota, as a whole, is enjoying good times these days. Please use your vision and leadership opportunities to spread and support the positive aspects of rural living. We may be small, but we are vital to the reputation of North Dakota and to one another.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely
Rev. Thomas M. Graner