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SB 2332 Testimony House Human Services Committee March 9, 2025

Chair Ruby and Members of the House Human Services Committee,

It's good to be with you today to talk about this important piece of legislation that will have a lasting impact on North Dakota's emergency services and public safety. Our first responders—firefighters, paramedics, and law enforcement—are the backbone of our communities. They are the ones who answer the call when disaster strikes, yet many of them are facing increasing challenges. Several of you on this committee have been a part of the conversation, but we know that public safety and emergency services across the board are facing staffing issues and outdated equipment.

As legislators, we continue to hear about the challenges volunteer fire departments are facing as their members age, less community members joining the department and, in many cases, due to depopulation, less people to even staff the department. Those who follow me or have provided written testimony are able to provide you with very specific issues facing the various entities they are familiar with.

An average of two ambulance services closing each biennium over the past 10 years¹ and a recent survey completed by ND ambulance services identifying that as many as 30 may close in the next five years².

Last fall the Northwood police department closed³ requiring the city council to explore partnerships with neighboring towns or the county sheriff's office.

That's why I believe this study is so critical. The original version of 2332 proposed the creation of the Legacy Earnings Emergency Services and Public Safety Fund, a dedicated funding source designed to strengthen our emergency response systems across the state. Modeled after the Outdoor Heritage Fund, this Fund would have provided grants vetted by a Board comprised of statewide associations most directly involved with law enforcement, fire safety, emergency medical service and emergency management in North Dakota. 2332 was amended into a study because the committee felt that it would be a good idea for the legislature to bring stakeholders together and look at the entire

¹ [North Dakota Emergency Medical Services System Presentation](https://ndlegis.gov/sites/default/files/committees/68-2023/25.5035.02000_presentation1020.pdf) (slide 19) - https://ndlegis.gov/sites/default/files/committees/68-2023/25.5035.02000_presentation1020.pdf

² [North Dakota Monitor](https://northdakotamonitor.com/2025/01/08/north-dakota-lawmakers-consider-bill-to-prevent-abrupt-ambulance-service-closures/) (1/8/2025), *North Dakota lawmakers consider bill to prevent abrupt ambulance service closures* - <https://northdakotamonitor.com/2025/01/08/north-dakota-lawmakers-consider-bill-to-prevent-abrupt-ambulance-service-closures/>

³ [InForum](https://www.inforum.com/news/north-dakota/northwood-police-department-signs-off-for-final-time) (9/30/2024), *Northwood Police Department signs off for the final time* - <https://www.inforum.com/news/north-dakota/northwood-police-department-signs-off-for-final-time>

emergency response system throughout the state, rather than address individual aspects of it with individual pieces of legislation as we have the past few sessions as well as the current session.

By ensuring that funds are strategically allocated, this legislation creates a long-term, sustainable approach to funding emergency services rather than relying on band aid fixes.

When a paramedic arrives at a car accident faster because of better funding, when a rural fire department has the staff to handle an emergency, when a mental health crisis is handled with the right support—that's the impact this legislation will have.

We often say that public safety is a priority, but priorities must be backed by action. This study is our chance to take a more proactive, collaborative approach to make a meaningful difference, ensuring that our first responders have the support they need to protect us all and the resources to reach those who need them most.

Thank you. I'm happy to stand for any questions or comments you may have.