

Energy and Natural Resources Committee

SB 2267

March 11, 2025

Chairman Porter and members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee:

I am Grant Larson, Director of the Environmental Health Division at Fargo Cass Public Health (FCPH), a city-county health department based in Fargo, ND. We are a member of the Southeast Public Health Collaborative and have primary responsibility for onsite septic system inspection programs in Cass, Richland, Sargent, and Traill Counties. We also provide septic expertise and inspections for Steele and Ransom Counties. Approximately 29% of North Dakota's population lives in these regionally served areas. Fargo Cass Public Health supports the regionally septic program with 3 individually licensed Environmental Health Practitioners (EHP's).

FCPH has provided environmental protection to our communities through a septic system licensing and inspection program originating in Cass County, in 1971, with our collaborative member counties beginning service in 2003 (Richland) and 2016 (Sargent and Traill). Septic system inspections make up the second largest inspection program at FCPH; in 2024, there were 121 installations of new system construction, 56 evaluations of existing systems for property sale, over 1000 hours of service provided for inspection and professional consultation with our local installers, and 11,265 miles traveled for this program.

FCPH has provided record retention for every inspected system since 1971, on-site consultation for homeowners and installers during either system failures and/or new construction, continuing education for our local installers, and advice to realty companies for selling homes with septic systems. Cass County also requires consultation with FCPH regarding septic system requirements prior to allowing subdivision and building permits. Local installers and homeowners look to us for septic guidance, since we provide accurate and timely information.

Although the ND Plumbing Board and staff are experts in plumbing, they do not perform routine septic work and therefore have less knowledge than local public health departments. This bill would charge the plumbing board to oversee a statewide septic system program which would include inspections and permitting. To provide adequate administration, the plumbing board would be required to hire and train an entire workforce to cover a huge geographical area. This bill would also preclude the plumbing board from

contracting with local public health units which currently provide professional septic services at little, or no, cost to the State of North Dakota.

Fargo Cass Public Health values the work we do with our onsite septic system program, the local industry professionals, and the citizens who we serve with our expertise. There is a clear need for change which includes state program leadership, a partnership in code adoption, and installer licensing which can be accomplished by a qualified department such as the Department of Environmental Quality. Local public health departments take pride in the long-standing partnerships with our community partners which have proven to benefit the entire septic program as well as industry. Drastic changes to the local septic program structure will result in a cascading failure for our citizens, businesses, and our environment.

For these reasons, I would encourage you **not** to support SB 2267.

Respectfully submitted by,

Grant J. Larson

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Registered Environmental Health Sanitarian/Environmental Health Practitioner