
Good morning, Chairman Longmuir of the Political Subdivisions Committee. My name is Sandy Tibke. On behalf of the Foundation for a Healthy North Dakota, I am writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill No. 2097, establishing a Rural Community Endowment Fund to support North Dakota's rural communities.

The Foundation for a Healthy North Dakota is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of all North Dakotans, with a particular focus on underserved rural areas. We believe that thriving rural communities are essential to the overall health of our state, and SB 2097 represents a significant investment in ensuring the long-term prosperity of these vital communities.

We are particularly supportive of the following aspects of the bill:

- The creation of a permanent endowment fund that will provide sustainable support for rural communities with populations under 1,000 residents
- The focus on critical needs, including housing, workforce development, business recruitment, infrastructure, and other community needs
- The establishment of a diverse committee to oversee grant awards, ensuring that funding decisions are made with input from rural community residents
- Partnering with nonprofit organizations that have expertise in rural community development

Rural communities in North Dakota face unique challenges, including aging infrastructure, limited housing options, healthcare access issues, and workforce shortages. The Rural Community Endowment Fund would provide a dedicated source of funding to address these challenges and help rural communities build capacity for long-term sustainability.

We believe that the \$5,000,000 appropriation proposed in this bill represents a wise investment in our state's future. By establishing a permanent endowment, the impact of these funds will be multiplied over time, creating lasting benefits for generations of North Dakotans.

The Foundation for a Healthy North Dakota stands ready to collaborate with the state and other partners to ensure the success of this important initiative. We urge you to support Senate Bill No. 2097 and make this critical investment in the health and vitality of our rural communities.