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**Testimony of
Matt Perdue
North Dakota Farmers Union
In support of SB 2097
House Political Subdivisions Committee
March 7, 2025**

Chairman Longmuir and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2097. My name is Matt Perdue, and I am testifying on behalf of North Dakota Farmers Union's members. NDFU supports SB 2097.

During our most recent annual convention, our members adopted a list of priorities for this legislative session. Included in that list investments in childcare, rural food access, affordable housing, and rural economic development. Our members recognize that the future of agriculture is strongly connected to quality of life in rural communities. We strongly support investments in our rural communities.

SB 2097 establishes a Rural Community Endowment Fund to support communities with a population of fewer than 1,000 residents. Interest from the fund would be used to address housing, workforce, infrastructure, economic development and other community needs. The bill establishes an endowment, meaning the earnings from the endowment would be available for grants for rural projects in the 2027-29 biennium and thereafter.

SB 2097 is one of two rural development bills passed by the Senate. The other bill is SB 2390, which would establish a Rural Catalyst program. In their current forms, each bill would receive an appropriation of \$5 million. NDFU encourages the committee to consider pulling the best features of each proposal into a single, unified bill that delivers the maximum benefit for rural communities. As the committee does so, we think it is important for a portion of funds to target communities with a population of 1,500 or less.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I will stand for any questions.