

SB 2158 Testimony

Chairman Longmuir and Members of the House Political Subdivision Committee, for the record my name is Brandt Dick, President of the ND Small Organized Schools and Burleigh and Emmons County Superintendent of Schools. I am here today to support SB 2158, a piece of legislation that provides a tool for local communities to determine the best way to utilize funds for the benefit of their schools and broader community. This bill allows county committees to allocate unobligated cash balances from a dissolved school district to another political subdivision within the geographic area of the former district. Such a provision provides an opportunity amid a very difficult reality, dissolving a school district and becoming part of other school districts.

In the case of the Edmore School District, as with other districts that may face dissolution, the carryover funds consist of local property taxes and state contributions, as well as proceeds from the sale of assets that are part of the school district. These resources are generated within the school district and should be allowed to be used in a manner that supports the community's future where the school building is located. By allowing these funds to be distributed to local entities rather than solely allocated for tax credits, SB 2158 ensures that communities retain the ability to invest in infrastructure, and other local needs that directly impact their residents.

SB 2158 will not be utilized in all dissolution situations. I worked with a dissolution in Emmons County where there was no community or other political subdivision which would have needed the school building. In that situation, the building was auctioned off, and the money left over and raised by the selling of assets was returned to taxpayers.

The closure of a school can be a devastating event for a rural community, stripping it of an essential institution that often serves as its economic and social hub. Allowing these funds to be redirected within the affected region provides an opportunity to maintain vital services and programs that benefit residents, students, and local businesses alike. By keeping resources in the community and allowing for a viable plan of community utilization of the school facility, passage of SB 2158 can help sustain the very fabric of small towns and ensure they remain viable places to live, work, and raise families.

I urge this committee to support SB 2158 and recognize its value in strengthening local decision-making and community resilience. Thank you for your time and consideration. I will stand for questions.