



Testimony of Briselda Hernandez Herrera in support of HB 1524
To the Senate Appropriations Government Operations Committee
March 31, 2025

Chairman Wanzek and Members of the Committee,

My name is Briselda Hernandez Herrera, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Souris Basin Planning Council (SBPC). SBPC supports North Dakota's Region 2, which includes Bottineau, Burke, McHenry, Mountrail, Pierce, Renville, and Ward counties. For over a decade, I have had the privilege of working alongside communities, leaders, and businesses, witnessing firsthand the incredible impact of collaboration in improving quality of life and fostering economic growth. However, many of the communities I work with face significant challenges in advancing local projects due to limited funding and the fact that most community leaders are stretched with numerous volunteer roles. In North Dakota, fewer than half of the counties have dedicated economic development organizations, and only 19 small communities have part- or full-time development staff. With pressing needs such as housing, food deserts, and childcare, it is difficult for communities to tackle these issues alone.

I come before you today to express my strong support for HB 1524 which would provide much-needed capacity to advance economic and community development in a strategic and resourceful way. This bill would help regional councils expand their staff and strengthen their ability to serve communities effectively.

Why Regional Councils?

Formed by state law (NDCC 54-40.1), North Dakota's eight regional councils serve as on-the-ground partners in advancing community projects. These councils provide technical assistance, expertise, and a collaborative framework to drive progress. As a public servant, I understand the importance of responsible stewardship of public funds, and I firmly believe regional councils have a strong track record of maximizing resources and maintaining transparency.

- **Transparency & Accountability:** Regional councils adhere to strict governance requirements, including annual reporting and audits. Their boards are primarily composed of elected city officials and county commissioners, ensuring oversight and proper use of funds.
- **Strategic Planning:** Every five years, regional councils develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), a community-driven plan that aligns regional priorities to optimize resources and maximize impact.



- **Strong Partnerships:** Regional councils maintain well-established relationships with local and state leaders, as evidenced in the testimonies submitted. Their work engages stakeholders across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, ensuring that programs complement—not duplicate—existing efforts.
- **A Collaborative Network:** Regional councils operate within a shared network of expertise, knowledge, and resources, making them a powerful force for economic and community development. While each regional council serves a distinct region, they do not work in isolation. Instead, they collaborate, exchange best practices, and leverage their collective strengths. Each regional council brings unique expertise to the table—whether in infrastructure planning, grant administration, business development, planning and zoning, or housing. By working together, they create a well-rounded support system for communities. Ultimately, regional councils serve as a bridge between local needs and resources, ensuring that communities—regardless of size or capacity—have the support necessary to thrive. By working together, they amplify their impact, drive regional progress, and create a stronger, more resilient North Dakota.

Why Funding Now?

There is broad consensus that a regional approach is essential for effective economic and community development, and regional councils are well-positioned to lead these efforts. However, like the communities they serve, **regional councils face staffing shortages that limit their ability to maximize available funding opportunities, coordinate local and regional projects, and implement long-term solutions.** HB 1524 is informed by an in-depth assessment of capacity needs and would address key regional priorities, including project development and implementation, grant writing and administration, business development, workforce development, and housing development. Imagine what could be accomplished if regional councils operated at full capacity! This is why I am asking you to support **HB 1524 for \$5.75 million.** Information on what this funding will support is included in the Attachment – Building North Dakota Regions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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