

March 16, 2025

Senate Industry and Business Committee

HB 1398 -- IN FAVOR

CHAIRMAN BARTA AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Allison Olimb. I am the editor of the Walsh County Press in Park River, ND, and I currently serve as the President of the North Dakota Newspaper Association.

Please accept this written testimony IN FAVOR of House Bill 1398.

North Dakota Century Code 26.1-03-10 is simple. It states that an insurance company is required to publish an abstract of its annual statement in a newspaper of general circulation where the company has an agency.

For decades, the interpretation of that line has been that EACH COMPANY be designated to a newspaper of general circulation within said district. This year, that process has changed to ALL COMPANIES in each district being assigned to one newspaper in each district.

Over the past 16 years of my career, we have published 19-22 insurance abstracts three times each May, which results in just under two pages of space.

This year is the first year of my career that we have been told we will not receive a single abstract. The entirety of our abstracts will be going to the neighboring newspaper in a community with a higher population.

This process has changed throughout my career from manual data entry and formatting to being able to copy from digital PDF forms. The only major change to the template has been the name of the insurance commissioner. The "form prescribed by the commissioner" has not changed.

The law states that the insurance commissioner can choose where those abstracts are published in each district. That decision was made to only publish in the publication with the highest subscriber list in each district. For each insurance company, it is a nominal fee. For each newspaper, it is a percent of the budget that makes a huge impact. For a rural community, it could be devastating.

This system of keeping these annual statements public, which has been executed by the North Dakota Newspaper Association for decades, ensures that the insurance agencies comply with state law without requiring state interference.

House Bill 1398 would bring a clear definition to the process that already works.

By splitting the work across the state's available publications and not limiting it to one per district, there is a series of checks and balances to ensure that each abstract is executed correctly.

It is the newspaper industry that is putting this information into an accessible format. It is the newspaper industry that is ensuring that the consumer can access the data across multiple issues. It is the newspaper industry that posts public notices on www.ndpublicnotices.com at no additional charge to units of government. For each insurance company, the cost is \$250. The cost to the state is zero.

The system has remained the same because it works, and it serves the public good. North Dakotans who access the news via print publications are intelligent consumers. I urge you to support House Bill 1398 to ensure that rural newspapers like mine can continue to provide this essential service to our communities.

Thank you for your consideration.