

Testimony in Support for HB 1496
Representative Austin Foss, District 44

Chairman Barta and members of the Industry and Business Committee, thank you for the opportunity to introduce House Bill 1496. This bill provides much-needed clarification in our landlord obligation laws regarding reasonable heat standards.

A constituent recently brought this issue to my attention after experiencing inadequate heating in their rental unit this winter. Their apartment building has been kept at just 55 degrees, and their baseboard heater—meant to heat their unit—has not provided sufficient warmth. As a result, the cold has exacerbated their medical condition, causing significant discomfort and pain.

Under current law, landlords are required to provide “reasonable heat,” but the North Dakota Century Code does not define what that means. This lack of clarity creates uncertainty for both tenants and landlords, leading to inconsistent expectations, difficulties in resolving disputes, and, in extreme cases, serious hardship—especially during our state’s harsh winters.

HB 1496 directly addresses this issue by establishing a clear and objective definition of “reasonable heat.” The bill ensures that between October 1st and April 30th, rental units must maintain a minimum temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit, except in cases where tenants control their own heating. This provides renters with a reliable standard while giving landlords a clear, enforceable guideline to follow.

This bill is not about imposing additional burdens—it is about ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability in landlord-tenant relationships. By removing ambiguity in the law, we can help prevent unnecessary disputes, protect tenants from unsafe living conditions, and provide landlords with the clarity they need to meet their obligations.

I urge the committee to support HB 1496 as a practical, commonsense solution that benefits both renters and landlords across North Dakota. Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions you may have.