



Roosevelt Custer
REGIONAL COUNCIL

13 E Divide Ave
PO Box 1143
Bowman, ND 58623
701.483.1241
teran@swnd.org

Testimony of Teran Doerr
Roosevelt Custer Regional Council
In Favor House Bill 1524
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Chairman Barta and Members of the Senate Industry and Business Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1524. This bill is an investment in North Dakota's communities, ensuring they have the expertise and capacity to access funding, implement projects, and grow. The funding in this bill is not for regional councils, it is for the communities we serve.

Many small towns do not have experts to help them apply for grants, manage projects, or plan for the future. When that happens, funding goes unclaimed, and opportunities are lost. Regional councils help communities cut through the complexity, ensuring that these dollars reach the people and places that need them most.

Right now, North Dakota is making historic investments in workforce, housing, childcare, and infrastructure. But funding alone does not make projects happen; planning, execution, and technical assistance do. The programs and dollars exist, but they only benefit communities that have the capacity to apply, plan, and follow through on projects. That is where regional councils come in.

Even rural communities with economic developers struggle to navigate the complexity of state and federal programs. Many rely on volunteers or staff who are already stretched thin. Without direct support, money gets left on the table, projects stall, and smaller communities miss out on opportunities that should be available to all of North Dakota.

Before July 2022, our regional council struggled, and our communities lost out on millions of dollars in grants and projects. Since then, we have helped secure Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) for critical projects in Mott, Regent, Medora, and Bowman. We have assisted businesses and communities in accessing USDA and EDA grants for economic development and future tourism investments. We secured a Department of Energy grant for a rural fire department in Amidon. When Sanford closed its rural nursing home in Mott, we assisted in securing funding to reopen the clinic and basic care facility, and when the project fell short, we found an additional \$200,000 to complete it. We have also supported childcare, workforce, and housing initiatives across our region.

Despite this success, we operate with only three to four staff members serving up to 10 counties, and most of our staffing is tied to specific grant-funded projects. That means we can only assist with programs we are funded to administer. Many communities call us for help with housing, childcare, and infrastructure projects, but without dedicated funding, we simply do not have the capacity to assist everyone who needs it.

With dedicated funding, regional councils across the state could hire staff dedicated to helping communities access and implement state and federal funding, including:

- **Workforce and housing development**, ensuring state investments reach communities of all sizes.
- **Childcare expansion**, making sure funding is used effectively and sustainably.
- **Rural infrastructure planning**, assisting with grants for essential services like water, sewer, roads, and emergency services.
- **Business retention and expansion**, helping small businesses navigate resources to grow and thrive.

The state is making major investments in workforce, housing, childcare, and economic development. But none of these investments will succeed if communities do not have the expertise and support to access them.

Regional councils have a long history of turning small investments into big results. We help communities develop strategic plans for long-term growth, secure and layer funding from multiple sources, and implement and manage projects to ensure funding is used effectively.

This is not just a funding bill, it is a commitment to making sure rural investments actually happen. Without continued investment, many small communities will continue to struggle while larger cities get ahead. HB 1524 ensures that every region has the tools to make the most of state and federal dollars.

I urge you to support this bill so that North Dakota's small towns can keep growing and thriving.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Teran Doerr