

Written Testimony for the  
**House Political Subdivisions**

January 14, 2021

Erica Johnsrud, McKenzie County Auditor/Treasurer



**RE: SUPPORT for HB 1108**

Good morning, Chairman Dockter, and members of the Committee. My name is Erica Johnsrud and I am the Auditor/Treasurer for McKenzie County. I would like to add a few additional points to the testimony of Donnell Preskey, from whom you have already heard today.

While this bill is not highly technical, it is an important one to counties. A similar bill was presented during the 2019 Legislative Session and was defeated, but many things have changed since 2019, including the move of some newspapers to digital formats and the closure of others.

In 2019 McKenzie County spent a total of \$25,601.53 with our official newspaper, the McKenzie County Farmer. In 2020 that number was \$37,751.93. This amount includes many different types of publications and other services, such as commission minutes and bills, election notices and results, legal notices for our Planning & Zoning, notices of bid opportunities, job postings, notary stamps, newspaper subscriptions, and other printing needs. Last year alone McKenzie County spent \$13,220.50 for the publication of our meeting minutes and bills list, which are also published to the county's website approximately one week before their publication in the newspaper.

Analyzing information that was provided to me by several other counties, approximately 30% of the total minutes and bills publication cost is for the publication of the listing of bills. While not a staggering figure to some, it does represent funds that could be allocated to providing additional services to county residents.

I'm sure you are going to hear that these publications are vital to the revenue stream of local newspapers. In 2019 the ND Newspaper Association Executive Director, Steve Andrist, stated in a Bismarck Tribune article that about 10% of newspapers revenue is derived from county publications. Assuming that number is correct, that means that the

portion of the publication costs for the bills in McKenzie County is less than just 1.0% of the total revenue for our local newspaper.

It is important to note that I am not here to advocate for the removal of publishing items in the local newspaper. However, where information is posted has shifted and will likely continue to do so. This information is directly available in a more useful, public, and mobile friendly formats either from transparency portals used by several counties or from publications directly on county websites.

In 2018 McKenzie County moved to an electronic format of storing our bills/invoices and in conjunction with the County Recorder's Office we have established a "County Library" where citizens can not only search for information on deeds and other recorded documents, but also all invoices paid and all editions of our official newspaper. I know of other counties that are also moving to a more digital format, which will only increase the ease at which the public has the ability to access the information they are seeking.

Thank you for your time today and I urge a DO PASS recommendation on HB 1108.