

**Testimony of Cole Higlin
North Dakota Recreation & Park Association
To Senate Appropriations
In Support of HB 1019**

Chairman Holmberg and Members of the Committee, my name is Cole Higlin, and I am the public policy committee chair of the North Dakota Recreation and Park Association (NDRPA). NDRPA represents more than 900 members across the state and works to advance parks, recreation and conservation for an enhanced quality of life in North Dakota. I am here on behalf of NDRPA to support House Bill 1019.

Public parks and recreation facilities are valuable community infrastructure, and usage in our state is significant. Six out of every 10 North Dakota households (60 percent) report outdoor recreation is very important, while 93 percent report it is important, according to the *2018-2022 North Dakota State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*. Five percent more North Dakota households feel outdoor recreation is very important today compared to five years ago.

NDRPA supports the park operations and maintenance budget for the Parks and Recreation Department in House Bill 1019. We also ask for the committee's consideration of park district infrastructure funding as well as the Community Grant Program, a 50/50 match grant program last funded in 2015-2017, the only state funding for community parks and recreation facilities such as pools and multi-purpose playing fields. As noted in the *2018-2022 SCORP*, 49 percent of outdoor recreation providers report demand for facilities and activities exceeds supply for their users. Over the next five years, additional funding needed to fulfill reported existing unmet capital needs is \$319 million.

With the state's growing population, the Parks and Recreation Department and local agencies need sufficient resources to provide and build upon our public parks. Parks, open space, trails, greenways, water, recreation facilities, programs, and services provide documented benefits, among them economic, health, environmental, and social/community. Providing safe, affordable and accessible recreation opportunities for our citizens and visitors is essential to maintaining North Dakota's commitment to a high quality of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to express support for this bill and for your continued commitment to North Dakota's quality of life needs.