



Testimony of Dana Hager
Economic Development Association of North Dakota
In Support of SB 2273
March 9, 2023

Chair Thomas and members of the House Agriculture Committee:

My name is Dana Hager, and I am the executive director of the Economic Development Association of North Dakota (EDND). EDND represents more than 80 state economic development organizations and businesses on the front line of economic development efforts throughout North Dakota. The organization's primary purpose is to promote the creation of new wealth throughout North Dakota, develop more vibrant communities and improve quality of life. I want to express our support for SB 2273.

EDND believes healthy and vibrant communities are essential in attracting talent to live and work in our communities. The future of North Dakota's rural areas depends on the quality of life found in those communities.

Rural grocery stores are anchor businesses in our rural communities. Providing residents with a full range of fresh, frozen and shelf-stable foods is a benefit we take for granted until there is no access. Many small businesses struggle with competition from larger chain stores, and in many cases a shrinking customer base, causing shifts and changes in community perspective and ability for operations to remain open.

A local grocery store can be a selling point for business owners actively seeking highly skilled workers, particularly for families relocating. Traveling a considerable distance to shop at a grocery store likely sways the relocation choice to a community with convenient shopping over one that does not have these facilities. Grocery stores also serve as an important social network as they often support community organizations, activities and fundraisers. When a small-town grocery store closes, other businesses in town suffer as a significant decrease in foot traffic follows.

Every community has different assets and needs, however, attracting and retaining a local grocery store is essential to the long-term viability of many rural North Dakota communities. Therefore, establishing a pilot program through SB 2273 is critical in preserving our rural communities' vibrancy and productivity.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for SB 2273 and for your continued commitment to ensuring North Dakota is filled with vibrant communities and economic opportunities for all.