



**Testimony of Dana Hager
Economic Development Association of North Dakota
In Support of HB 1496
Jan. 30, 2023**

Chairman Nathe and members of the House Appropriations Education and Environment Division:

My name is Dana Hager, executive director of the Economic Development Association of North Dakota (EDND). I am here to express support for HB 1496 to provide rural housing opportunities throughout North Dakota communities.

The North Dakota Department of Commerce has been an important partner for economic development organizations throughout the state. EDND, individual communities and economic development organizations have a robust and collaborative relationship with the department and its staff, which makes a Commerce-based Rural Workforce Housing Grant exciting.

EDND understands that North Dakota businesses can only maximize the state's economy to the extent of their capacity to attract and retain a workforce. Rural communities are all unique, so strategies for rural workforce housing will vary greatly. This bill's approach will help leaders identify their region's unique strengths, challenges, and assets. Communities will be able to:

- 1. Conduct a housing study in the city to identify workforce housing needs, blighted property, and vacant lots within the city;*
- 2. Purchase blighted properties or vacant lots;*
- 3. Remove hazards or structures from blighted properties or vacant lots; and*
- 4. Provide up to \$10,000 per business for repairs or improvements if the business is located in a mixed-use property that will be used for rural workforce housing.*

Sustaining and maintaining support for rural development is critical as we face the challenges of workforce development and aging main streets in the coming years. During a time when we need every tool to help keep rural communities open for business, please consider a Do Pass for HB 1496.