



Testimony of Drew Courtney

HB 1147 Testimony

January 18, 2023

Thank you, Chair Vigesaa and members of the House Appropriations Committee, for the opportunity for the North Dakota Corn Growers Association to share our support of House Bill 1147 for legacy funding for local county and township bridges.

For the record, my name is Drew Courtney, and I am the Secretary Treasurer on the Board of Directors for the North Dakota Corn Growers Association (NDCGA), which serves as the voice, and represents more than 13,000 corn growers across the state. I farm near Oakes, ND with my cousin, wife and kids. I also serve on my township board.

Last month, Governor Burgum joined NDSU at the State Capitol to unveil a first of its kind comprehensive study of the economic contribution of agriculture in the state. For the year 2020, ag contributed nearly \$31 billion to the economy and more than 110,000 jobs and represented nearly 25 percent of the state economy.

Agriculture's economic success is tied in part to the availability of good, reliable, public infrastructure. As a township officer, I can speak firsthand about limited resources to maintain and repair local roads and bridges. According to a study by the upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, in 2019, 56% of local bridges in North Dakota were rated as being in good condition. In 2022, that number dropped to 51%. The number of bridges rated in poor condition remained at 8%. During that same time, the cost to replace bridges has increased by about 25%. Most of us don't even think that a bridge may not be safe when we cross it, knowing that we have little or no choice. But it's top of mind when we see that a road is closed and we can't get to our field, our property, without a lengthy detour when fuels prices are so high, and time is limited. North Dakota will need to invest more than \$10.5 billion over the next 20 years to maintain local, township, and tribal roads and bridges according to their study.

Most townships do not have the funds to repair local bridges and are not able to levy to the level needed. As you know, the Legacy Fund is the "people's fund," to be invested back into the heart of North Dakota. I cannot think of a better use for these funds than to use them for infrastructure throughout the heart of the state, for a purpose that will benefit the common good and not a narrow interest.

The North Dakota Corn Growers Association mission statement is "growing a healthy, profitable business climate for northern corn," and this state investment would help the state's corn growers towards their economic success. Thank you for your time and we urge your support of HB 1147. I stand for any questions you may have.