

STEELE COUNTY

Emergency Management

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COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:
1st Dist. Brandon Oxton Finley
2nd Dist. Richard Strand Finley
3rd Dist. Perry Brown Hope
4th Dist. Brandon Krueger Hope
5th Dist. Don Huso Finley

Testimony Prepared for the House Appropriations Committee

March 4, 2023

By: Ben Gates, Director of Emergency Management, Steele County

RE: Support for SB 2183 – Relating to snow removal grants and reimbursements; transfer; report; and emergency declaration

Chairman Vigesaa and the House Appropriations Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2183. I am Ben Gates; Director of Emergency Management in Steele County and I am writing to you in my capacity within that role. I am writing in support of SB 2183.

As is stated in my previous testimony, we have seen a hardship in Steele County with the continued snow we have received throughout the winter months. The hardships have continued into the beginning of 2023 as well as indicated by our accounts receivable. Unfortunately, our A/R is a month behind. Thus, work completed in December 2022 was billed in January 2023 and in some cases not paid until February 2023. These cases are repeated across the State to other counties, cities, and townships.

Attached to this document is an excel spreadsheet, converted to a .pdf file, detailing the reimbursements back to the Townships and the County if this bill were to pass as written. In total, 12 of the 20 townships in Steele County will be included in this grant, including the County as a whole. The total amounts shown are indicative of final numbers from the October – December (early) snow season and are **NOT** inclusive of the (late) snow season of January – April. These numbers can be seen broken down among each township and the County; however, the total grant amount back to Steele County would be **\$37,568.88**. This amount is over 1 mill that Steele County levies during its budget cycle.

Taking into consideration the new budget year (Steele County's fiscal year is January – December), we have almost **QUADRUPLED** our annual snow removal budget. This, again, is indicative across most of the State. As the snow season continues, Steele County is considering again to hire more contractors to come in and push the snow back away from the right-of-way along the County roads to reduce drifting and blowing snow concerns. To date, contractors have been paid almost \$20,000 with an additional \$35,000 request coming at the next County Commission meeting.

In addition to the County, each Township and City has been affected in a similar fashion. From a township standpoint, most of these townships were heavily affected in the Spring 2022 Flood and are still recovering from this event in all aspects, including financially. This snow season has created a burden that goes above and beyond what the townships can handle. This last year (2022) has been an

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intense year for the citizens across the State – heavily affected are these smaller jurisdictions that just don't have the tax base required to produce the funding needed to support the continued flood recovery and snow response efforts.

When the snow season is all said and done, Steele County could potentially see an additional 25% - 30% increase in snow removal costs. Steele County, like most across the State, takes the approach to keep taxes as low as possible for the citizens in the County. A reimbursement grant like the one proposed allows for instant tax relief by allowing almost 2 County Mills to come back into the County immediately and therefore helps to lower the total amount that will need to be levied during the upcoming budget cycle.

This bill was amended and passed unanimously in the Senate to include \$20 million in the early (Oct – Dec) snow season with an additional \$5 million for the late (Jan – Apr) snow season with a rollover clause for any funding not used in the early snow season to rollover to the late snow season. Additionally, the amended bill indicates a 150% comparison to the previous 5 years average with a reimbursement grant of 60% of the 150% comparison. This bill was amended as such at the requests of other Counties, Cities, and Townships.

This bill is a good bill – plain and simple.

Chairman Vigasaa and Committee Members, again, I would like to thank you for your consideration of this bill. On behalf of the Townships and Cities within and Steele County itself, I would like to reiterate that we fully support this bill. We would like to encourage the Committee to pass this bill and expedite it to the House Floor for an immediate vote so as to expedite the funding back to the jurisdictions.

Thank you for your consideration,

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