



Office of the Commission President

Thursday, January 26, 2023

Re: DO PASS Recommendation for HB 1279

Dear Political Subdivision Committee:

It is my honor to welcome every new officer to the West Fargo Police Department at West Fargo City Commission meetings. During my welcome, I make sure to thank their friends and families for sharing their loved one with the community. Coming from a law enforcement family and former law enforcement myself, I know the sacrifice families make with the job. As you watch your loved one walk out the door, you know tragedy could become part of your day.

HB 1279 came from a near tragic event that occurred in West Fargo. I stood in the hallways with Officer Tim Brown's family and his fellow officers in the hours after his on-duty heart attack. I heard the family take in the grave updates with less-than-optimistic outcomes and have to weigh decisions. I offered support to his fellow officers as they were no doubt reminded of the same situation just 5 months earlier when we lost Lt. Adam Gustafson. I thought about Officer Brown's family, who shared him with the community and were suffering the consequences of the generosity. Imagine if we had known in those moments that he would not be covered by Workforce Safety Insurance because of an arbitrary timeline?

In North Dakota, the legislature has worked hard to create the safest environment possible for our law enforcement and firefighters. You've developed close working relationships with the profession's leadership to understand the issues facing them and shape legislation that protects our communities. This work has made North Dakota a state that officers seek out to work in. The lack of support from the 5-year presumption clause does not align with this work.

It also threatens the vital recruitment work our agencies are conducting to fill vacant positions. Since Sept. 2020, the West Fargo Police Department has filled 8 positions from out of state. Experienced officers are seeking North Dakota as a place to work, but we now know they will be excluded by the presumption clause for 5 years even if they have it in other states. Our own Chief of Police, a 32-year veteran law enforcement officer, is currently not covered by WSI. With the competitive job market, details like this can become the difference and can lead to a decline in candidates.

My first oath is to the safety of my citizens and that is something I'm not willing to compromise on. I believe this extends to the safety and support my officers, firefighters and families receive. No one should have to risk their security to serve the community. To me, this is not a dollars and cents issue for the City. I cannot in good conscience ask these individuals to put their lives on the line on day 1, unless I know on day 1 they will have the full support they deserve.

For these reasons I urge a DO PASS on HB 1279.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernie Dardis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bernie" and last name "Dardis" clearly legible.

Bernie Dardis, Commission President
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