

TESTIMONY OF

**Sara Otte Coleman, Director Tourism and Marketing Division
ND Department of Commerce**

Good morning, Chairman Ruby and members of the Transportation Committee, I am Sara Otte Coleman, Director of the Tourism and Marketing Division at the North Dakota Department of Commerce. I am here today to testify in support of HB 1394 which establishes a logo signage program to assist travelers looking for services along North Dakota highways.

I am sure most of you have traveled in other states and have found the blue logo signs helpful in finding services. North Dakota is one of only two states that does not allow these logo signs which are relied on by travelers looking for hotels, restaurants, and fuel. Our office receives calls and emails from visitors regularly who are frustrated that we do not provide this service and curious why not? This is a hard question to answer as there is really no downside to providing this service. The program would likely not cost taxpayers and would increase revenue spent by visitors.

Tourism is one of North Dakota's largest industries. In 2021, we hosted 21.7 million visitors who spent \$2.61 billion dollars. Of those dollars, \$767 million was spent on food and beverage, \$521 million on transportation, and \$384 million on lodging. How many more gallons of fuel, cheeseburgers, or hotel stays may have been sold if the signs had let travelers know that these services were available?

A few weeks ago, we used focus groups from across the country to provide input to help us design the best possible tourism marketing campaign. Most participants had not previously visited North Dakota. Of the ones that had, the most common theme was that they had traveled through the state and there was nothing to see. While the signs may not dramatically change that impression, they will certainly help by luring visitors off the highway and into our communities where they may spend some time and money.

Commerce urges your support of HB 1349, thank you.