

Testimony Prepared for the
Senate Appropriations – Education and Environment Committee

January 25, 2023

By: Neal Messer, Commissioner, Stark County

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

Chairman Sorvaag and members of the Senate Appropriations Education and Environment Committee, thank you for allowing me to come before your committee today. My name is Neal Messer, I currently serve as a County Commissioner for Stark County. I am here to testify in favor of SB 2183. SB 2183 as proposed would assist and help offset the tremendous extra costs our road departments incurred in response to the November and December storms that took place in our area.

The April, November and December 2022 snow storms made for an extremely tough and demanding year for road crews in our area. According to the National Weather Service, Stark County received over 70 inches of snowfall during 2022. In fact, we were within 2-3 inches of the highest amount ever recorded. Normally that amount would be around 30 inches in a calendar year. Stark County, like most other political subs, budget for “normal” amounts of snowfall.

According to our calculations that would be in line with the October through December timeframe proposed in SB2183, Stark County spent \$472,062.33 in snow related expenses, when the 2017-2021 five year average was \$59,741.30. That’s 790% above the five year average.

In addition to the traditional expenses of opening roads, we also spent a lot of time and resources assisting in “emergency calls.” Because Stark County Highway 10 runs parallel with I-94, many travelers think they can beat the system by googling alternate routes when I-94 has been closed by the NDDOT. Most of those calls are out of state travelers who end up getting stranded on Highway 10. Although we had numerous assists in this regard, one out of state traveler stands out. When he got stranded, the only clothes he had was a shirt, (no coat), jean shorts and flip flops on his feet. He ended up with severe frost bite and had to be transported twice, once to the Richardton Nursing home, and then the next day to the hospital in Dickinson for medical treatments. We of course, opened the roads for both of those trips. We also assisted in getting ambulances to and from at least three medical emergencies in our county. We also made emergency routes available both on the roadways and on private property to allow emergency utility personnel to repair downed power lines, so that our citizens could get their power restored. Keep in mind, all of this took place with record fuel prices staring us in the face.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill. I ask that this committee consider a do pass recommendation for SB 2183.