

STEELE COUNTY

Emergency Management

201 WASHINGTON AVE W
PO BOX 275
FINLEY ND 58230
(701) 524-2442

Emily Wigen AUDITOR
Kari Dekker TREASURER
Jenny Foss RECORDER/CLK of COURT
Charles A. Stock STATES ATTORNEY
Wayne Beckman SHERIFF
STEELE CO. PRESS OFFICIAL PAPER

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 Senate Appropriations – Education and Environment Committee
January 24, 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 Sorvaag and Senate Appropriations – Education and Environment 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.

The ending months of 2022 was a hard year on our Highway Department. From good weather to freezing rain to then feet of snow, our Highway Department worked an extraordinary amount to ensure that the public roads were in good enough shape for the rest of the traveling public. This required long hours with a stretch there in December of about 15 days straight of 16+ hour days. You won't have to look far to see the same process repeated across the State to include other counties, cities, and townships.

With this increase in hours, costs to operate obviously increased. We did the math according to the bill as written and found that our 5-year average for snow removal in the months from October to December from 2017 to 2021 was \$35,954.17. Our total expenditures for snow removal from October 2022 to December 2022 was \$107,396.06. In 3 short months, we almost **TRIPLED our expenses related to snow removal**. Doing the math further according to the bill, we estimate that a reimbursement grant would total near \$16,978.09 as the bill is currently written. This is a **MAJOR cost-savings/return** for a county of only 1,800 population. Needless to say, we are in full support of this bill passing through Legislature.

To date, we have NOT enlisted the help of the Cities or the Townships for their information/cost estimates. In speaking with a just a few of the Township Officers and one City Auditor, we are seeing a large range of estimates from 150% to over 400% in snow removal costs compared to the previous 5 years' average. The benefit for this type of bill is extreme and will be well welcomed throughout Steele County.

I would encourage the committee to consider some amendments to the bill. The first amendment would address the 200% question as discussed in the Committee Work on January 18, 2023. My

STEELE COUNTY

Emergency Management

201 WASHINGTON AVE W
PO BOX 275
FINLEY ND 58230
(701) 524-2442

Emily Wigen	AUDITOR
Kari Dekker	TREASURER
Jenny Foss	RECORDER/CLK of COURT
Charles A. Stock	STATES ATTORNEY
Wayne Beckman	SHERIFF
STEELE CO. PRESS	OFFICIAL PAPER

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

recommendation would be an amendment consideration to lower this to 150%. By doing so, this would address a larger majority of the Townships and Cities in my jurisdiction (and I'm sure throughout the State) and it would also allow for a larger majority of the funding to be dispersed. This amendment would be applied to both Section 1 and Section 2 of the bill.

The second amendment would address language considering the "roll-over" of any additional funding from Section 1 to Section 2. As we are all well aware, there is still a lot of winter left. From now through the end of April, we could still potentially see significant precipitation in the form of snow to rain, or any mixture there between. It would help ensure some flexibility in the funding portion in the event of any additional winter storms that we may receive.

Chairman Sorvaag 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.

I'm not sure I will be able to join the next hearing online or in person, so I would entertain any questions via email at bgates@nd.gov or via phone at 701-270-1738. Thank you.

Ben Gates
Director, Emergency Management
Steele County
C: 701-270-1738
E: bgates@nd.gov