



Testimony of Steve Forde in support of HB 1018 – with an amendment

To Senate Appropriations Committee – Government Operations Division

March 8, 2023

Chairman Wanzek and members of the Committee:

I am a Board Member of both the Red River Regional Council and Nelson County Job Development Authority and am a Nelson County Commissioner. I am the CFO of Nelson County Health System in McVile, ND, which is a nursing home, assisted living, hospital, and two rural clinics.

I'm seeking your consideration of an amendment to support \$8 million (\$1 million per biennia per region) funding for the eight regional councils which serve communities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and more statewide.

Created by NDCC 54-40.1 in 1973, the regional councils were to serve the purpose of establishing statewide policy for planning, economic development programs, operation, coordination and related cooperative activities of state/local governments to resolve issues and problems transcending individual jurisdictions. Yet, these organizations have not had a consistent long-term funding mechanism to meet this purpose.

Today, our northeast region of North Dakota needs more than 1,500 new employees in our small towns. We need to address the critical needs of housing, workforce, and childcare. In 2021/2022, Red River Regional Council enlisted Roger Brooks, a renowned national expert on destination development to secret shop our region and develop an action plan that would support visitor, resident, and investment attraction to northeastern North Dakota. The plan is ready to go – it calls for six professional staff to lead – which is currently not available due to the lack of funding.

Increased staff for our Regional Council to crucial for effective implementation of housing and workforce goals and investment in our communities. Red River Regional Council is the first stop for new or existing business looking for help in a variety of areas. The resources provided by their staff leads to improvements in each business or organization. Our healthcare facility has received assistance in several ways including ADA upgrades which has helped our patients and community members.

I urge your support for increasing the rural development capacity across the state by supporting this amendment for \$8 million for the eight regional councils.

Sincerely, Steve Forde, CFO [Signature]

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