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## **Testimony of Jennifer Dusek 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 Jennifer Dusek, Community Development Director for the City of Grafton.

**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 region can have a rural renaissance with the need for more than 1,500 new employees in our small towns – but only if we address the critical needs of **housing, workforce, and childcare**. In 2021/2022, we 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 capacity in this region would allow us to complete larger scale projects to address housing and workforce issues. We have already created solutions to increase business attraction, tourism efforts, and make our area an appealing destination. However, we cannot implement these proactive solutions without the necessary staffing. It is not sustainable or realistic to expect volunteers to steer a regional project. We simply do not have the manpower. Our region has an action plan ready to move forward, but we need the funding for professional staff to implement it.

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.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer Dusek, District 19