

February 3, 2023

Senate Industry and Business Committee
Chairman Doug Larsen

Chairman Larsen, and members of the committee, my name is Joe Raso, President and CEO of the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation. I'm writing in support of SB2306.

For decades, my organization has been led and supported by cities, counties, and hundreds of private companies within our metropolitan region. The combination of private and public sector leadership and funding has boded well for our economy and the primary sector companies we support.

In the past four years, we've had the honor of assisting more than 100 projects in our region, and these companies have invested nearly \$1 billion of capital and helped to create thousands of jobs, adding significant tax base at the local, regional, and state levels.

As the complexity of our work has grown, especially the need to focus on workforce development and the increased need to connect our K-12, higher education, industry, and community organizations, such as Chambers, EDCs and others, we realized that a more efficient and effective approach was needed regarding our public funding.

Thankfully, the State had, passed decades ago, section 11-11.1-01 of the North Dakota Century Code, a County Job Development Authority. In working with Cass County Commission Chair, Chad Peterson, and former North Dakota State Senator, Tony Grindberg, who now serves as a county commissioner, we realized that the foundation and intent of this legislation could provide a mechanism to serve our programming and leadership needs. Specifically, proposing modifications to the existing legislation would:

- Not change/impact those currently using the legislation if they still want to operate as they've been doing.
- Provide all counties across our state more flexibility in establishing a county JDA and maintain the intent of the legislation. Specifically,:
 - For larger markets, it alleviates situations where the current legislation requires the involvement of some government entities that haven't been involved, and generally aren't interested in serving on a JDA. And aligns the legislation with existing structures already in place with many economic development organizations, which already have public and private sector board members serving on their economic development boards.
 - For smaller markets, it alleviates situations requiring 10-15 people who must qualify as private and/or public representatives, which has shown to be a challenge with the current legislation.
- Create more alignment between the public sector and private sector as most counties have economic development organizations operating and this will link them even more closely.
- Keep the authority resting with the county elected officials, both in terms of determining the appropriate funding, but also approving those who serve on the JDA.

In closing, I'd like to thank Senator Klein and all the co-sponsors of this legislation. I know you have very full schedules and taking the time to understand hundreds of bills, and advocate for your own priority bills, is much appreciated. Your leadership isn't missed on me or those in economic development who support this legislation.

Sincerely,



Joe Raso, President & CEO
Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation