



P.O. Box 2747
Fargo, ND 58108

**HB 1519 Testimony in Support
Senate Transportation Committee
March 23, 2023**

Chairman Clemens and members of the Senate Transportation committee, I am Tony Grindberg, Principal Manager for Xcel Energy, North Dakota. We support HB 1519.

I am writing to express my support for House Bill 1519 and the allocation of funding to Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and autonomous technologies projects led by state agencies in North Dakota. UAS and autonomous technologies have the potential to bring numerous benefits to the state of North Dakota.

By way of background, Xcel Energy was the first utility in the nation (2016) to operate drones beyond-line-of-site for research and development, with approval from the Federal Aviation Administration. A year later Xcel Energy began a first-of-its-kind safety partnership with the FAA to research the safety operations of drone technology to inspect critical infrastructure. The ability to fly unmanned aircraft, or drones beyond the view of the pilot greatly enhances the efficiency, cost effectiveness and safety benefits of using this technology.

North Dakota is an excellent partner as the state has become a leader in advancing UAS technology. A few years ago, Xcel Energy and the University of North Dakota began a year-long research project using UAS technology to assess damage after severe weather events. Unmanned Aircraft Systems technology allows us to more quickly access damaged areas which dramatically reduces outage times and improves customer service.

Support for HB 1519 from natural resource management and agriculture to public safety and infrastructure inspection, mechanized autonomy increases efficiency and effectiveness in various industries.

In the oil and gas industry, UAS can help inspect pipelines, reducing the need for workers to physically inspect these structures and improving safety. In agriculture, UAS can provide farmers with real-time information about their crops, allowing them to make informed decisions about planting and harvest times, as well as identifying areas of their fields that may require additional attention.

Additionally, through this bill, autonomous technology can be used in greater volume for search and rescue missions, helping to locate missing individuals more quickly and effectively. Similar autonomous

methods can also be used to monitor natural disasters, such as wildfires or floods, providing critical information to first responders and allowing them to respond more effectively.

Given these benefits, I believe it is important that North Dakota allocate more funding to UAS projects led by state agencies. By doing so, North Dakota will not only improve the quality of services offered to its citizens, but it will also multiply the positive effects and North Dakota's investment in the Vantis network, cementing its position as a role model to the nation.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I strongly encourage the appropriation committee to support House Bill 1519.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions.