

TESTIMONY BY AMY MAZIGIAN IN FAVOR OF HB1143 TO MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE (Hearing Date: January 16, 2025)

Good afternoon. My name is Amy Mazigian, and I serve as Gate City Bank's Senior Vice President of Western North Dakota. For over 25 years, Gate City Bank has proudly partnered with the Great Plains Food Bank, supporting its bold mission to end hunger across North Dakota. Our bank has a long-standing history of giving back to the places where we live and work, driven by our commitment to creating a better way of life. Through charitable donations, team member volunteerism and in-kind gifts, we are honored to stand alongside the Great Plains Food Bank in helping those in need.

Today, I am here to share Gate City Bank's support of House Bill 1143, which calls for an Act to provide an appropriation to the agriculture commissioner for a food distribution facility grant program. This one-time investment by the North Dakota Legislature represents a meaningful step forward, fostering hope and expanding opportunities for hunger relief efforts through increased volunteer engagement. Ending hunger is a shared responsibility, and we are honored to support the Great Plains Food Bank mission through this important partnership.

For nonprofits, volunteers serve as the backbone of their operations – bolstering the organization's capacity to fulfill its purpose. This certainly is the case for the Great Plains Food Bank. Annually, more than 5,000 individuals of all ages from the faith, education, civic and business community share more than 15,200 hours of their time (valued at \$506,768¹ – or the equivalent of 7.3 fulltime employees) preparing millions of pounds of surplus food for statewide distribution. Gate City Bank is proud to be a part of this vital work, contributing over 1,700 total volunteer hours at the current Great Plains Food Bank statewide distribution facility in Fargo, their regional service center operations in Bismarck and in dozens of communities statewide aiding in their community food distribution efforts.

Gate City Bank team members help repack bulk food items received from their food industry partners, fill backpacks with child-friendly foods that are sent home with kids on Friday ensuring they have food to eat over the weekend, assemble mobile food pantry boxes that are delivered into underserved communities, build senior food pack boxes provided to income-eligible seniors and help distribute this food off the back of the Great Plains Food Bank semi directly to families living with food insecurity when the truck rolls into their town.

In September, at the Gate City Bank West Region Leadership Meeting, we concluded the day with a group volunteer session at Great Plains Food Bank in Bismarck. Many leaders expressed that it was the most rewarding volunteer event they had ever experienced. Some shared how fulfilling it is to make a difference, describing the pride they feel in supporting their neighbors and helping provide hope through something as essential as food. They also spoke of the camaraderie built during these volunteer efforts and the sense of purpose that comes from knowing their time directly contributes to a brighter future for their communities. One Gate City Bank volunteer remarked, "Great Plains Food Bank is truly an inspiration to our team members and others. We are deeply grateful for their dedication to feeding our communities." Indeed, our gratitude is immense. It takes the collective efforts of legislators, volunteers, business leaders, and many more to ensure that we continue to support those in need across our state.

¹ <https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/>

If passed, HB1143 will enable the Great Plains Food Bank to expand and enhance these efforts. The Great Plains Food Bank will invest dollars in the volunteer experience, supporting their operations to bring more food to more people, more often. Dollars will be allocated toward their volunteer engagement center, which will provide increased space for up to 100 volunteers at a time – doubling the existing capacity. It will provide an elevated experience for volunteers with the addition of a welcome center, lockers and comfort stations. And it will provide for an allergen repack room, expanding the types and quantities of food available to be repacked for statewide distribution. Without this investment in vital volunteer force, hunger relief efforts across North Dakota will be stifled.

In closing, Gate City Bank and our team members are honored to volunteer alongside the Great Plains Food Bank in the shared mission to end hunger for our neighbors in need. We respectfully ask for your support and to vote DO PASS on HB1143.