

**TESTIMONY OF  
TREVOR WOODS**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTHERN PLAINS UAS TEST SITE**

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**HOUSE BILL NO. 1429**

I am here today to provide testimony for House Bill No. 1429, which seeks to impose restrictions on the operation of remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) over certain areas such as homesteads, farmsteads, and agricultural operations. While the bill may be well-intentioned, it contains unresolved flaws, including federal preemption, redundancy with existing laws, the lack of exemptions for law enforcement and public safety, and the vagueness of key provisions that make enforcement impractical and legally questionable.

### **1. Federal Preemption**

The regulation of airspace, including the operation of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), falls under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Federal statutes such as the **Federal Aviation Act of 1958 (49 U.S.C. § 40103)** affirm that the United States government has "exclusive sovereignty of airspace" over the nation. Courts have consistently ruled that state and local governments cannot enact laws that conflict with federal regulations governing UAS operations, such as **Singer v. City of Newton, 284 F. Supp. 3d 125 (D. Mass. 2017)**, where a federal court struck down local drone regulations as preempted by FAA rules. House Bill No. 1429 conflicts with these federal laws and risks legal challenges, wasting taxpayer dollars in litigation.

### **2. Redundant Provisions Covered by Existing Laws**

This bill introduces unnecessary regulations that are already addressed under existing federal and state laws. Privacy concerns related to drone surveillance are comprehensively covered by federal privacy statutes and North Dakota's privacy laws. The **Fourth Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution and existing federal laws such as the **Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA)** already prohibit unauthorized surveillance activities. Additionally, careless and reckless drone operations are addressed by FAA regulations under **14 CFR § 107.23**, which prohibits operations endangering the safety of persons or property, making this bill redundant.

### **3. Lack of Exemptions for Law Enforcement and Public Safety**

House Bill No. 1429 does not adequately address critical exemptions for law enforcement and public safety operations. Public agencies rely on UAS for search and rescue missions, disaster

response, and surveillance of criminal activity. Restricting their operations without clearly defined exemptions could hinder emergency response capabilities and endanger lives.

Furthermore, the bill provides an overly narrow exception only for "reasonable commercial or agricultural purposes," without consideration of public safety needs. It is imperative that exemptions be clearly stated to ensure law enforcement agencies can continue leveraging UAS technology to protect the public.

#### **4. The Vagueness of 'Reasonable Commercial and Agricultural Purpose'**

The bill's language, particularly the phrase "**reasonable commercial and agricultural purpose,**" is too vague and leaves significant room for interpretation. What constitutes "reasonable" may vary widely, leading to inconsistent enforcement and legal uncertainty. Vague statutes have historically been struck down in court as unconstitutional under the **void-for-vagueness doctrine**, which requires laws to provide clear standards of enforcement. This ambiguous language makes the bill susceptible to legal challenges and could discourage legitimate drone operators from conducting necessary operations out of fear of misinterpretation.

#### **5. Potential Unenforceability**

The vague and overly broad scope of this bill would make enforcement nearly impossible. Determining whether a drone operator has committed an "intrusion" or "surveillance" violation would require significant resources, including sophisticated tracking technology and extensive legal interpretation. Law enforcement agencies, already stretched thin, would struggle to effectively enforce these provisions without clear, objective criteria.

#### **6. Impact on Innovation and Economic Growth**

North Dakota has earned a national reputation as a leader in UAS innovation and integration, consistently ranking as one of the most drone-friendly states according to the Mercatus Center's State Drone Commerce Rankings. The state's forward-thinking approach has fostered an environment that encourages technological advancements, economic growth, and job creation in the drone industry. However, House Bill No. 1429 could undermine this progress by introducing unnecessary regulatory burdens that conflict with the state's pro-innovation stance. Restrictive regulations could discourage businesses from investing in drone operations within North Dakota, driving economic opportunities to more permissive states and putting North Dakota's competitive edge at risk.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, House Bill No. 1429 in its current state is potentially unnecessary, redundant, and legally problematic. It conflicts with federal preemption, fails to account for public safety needs, introduces vague language that undermines enforceability, and imposes regulations already covered by existing laws. I respectfully urge the committee to reconsider this bill while also working with federal regulators to ensure balanced and effective UAS policies that promote innovation while addressing legitimate privacy and safety concerns.