

Chairman Mike Beltz and members of the Committee
House Agriculture Committee

House Bill HB 1591

Thursday, January 30, 2025

2:00 pm Room 327C North Dakota State Capital Building

IN SUPPORT OF BILL

Chairman Beltz and Agriculture Committee members.

The Greater Grand Forks Fair is submitting this testimony in support of HB 1591, the County Fair Resiliency Grant program. Many county fairs in North Dakota have aging facilities that are in need of major repairs or replacement. Some have smaller needs, but lack the funding to complete projects that are important. Others need to move their fairgrounds or reinvent their facilities. Almost all of these fairs are small budget organizations that are run by volunteers with very limited or no paid staff. Financial support available through a program such as this would greatly benefit the organizations, the facilities they manage, and the communities they serve.

Counties have very tight budgets and have limited resources available to use on fairgrounds property. They normally have higher priority uses for their available funds such as jails, courthouses, office facilities, etc. Here in Grand Forks County we are dealing with these issues. The county has told us that they will not be able to help us with funding any large projects on the fairgrounds.

We have many capital projects on our fairgrounds that we need to complete. We need repairs for our grandstands. They were built 90 years ago by the Works Progress Administration and dedicated by President Franklin Roosevelt. We have spent more than \$200,000 in the past several years on structural repairs. We have the facility inspected each year and complete some repair work each year based on need. Our engineer estimates we need another \$800,000 in repair work in the next 5-10 years. Most of these repairs are structural or for infrastructure. They do not take into consideration the need for a renovation and upgrade of the entire facility to make the structure more appealing and comfortable for people attending events. That could add another \$500,000 to \$1 million to the cost. Our annual budget to run the fairgrounds, make repairs, and put on the annual fair averages approximately \$300,000.

We need to repair major parts of our electrical infrastructure on our grounds. We spent \$130,000 on electrical work in 2024 on the north half of the grounds. We will need at least that or more to finish the work that is needed for the remainder of the property. We need to replace lines that are old and failing, update lighting, install new poles, etc. We have 1 bathroom building that is more than 50 years old and needs significant work. That will cost at least \$150-200,000. We have 2 steel buildings that are more than 40 years old and a pole barn that is approximately 25 years old. We have worked hard to maintain those structures, but each is in need of repairs in the near future. We have several other projects on our list of things we need to do or things that would improve our grounds.

Our fairgrounds has an economic impact on the Grand Forks community. This is true in almost every community that has a fairgrounds. We provide a variety of entertainment options during the summer months that bring people to town and give local people entertainment options. We normally have more than 100,000 people use the fairgrounds during the May through September period of time. Highlights include some of the best dirt track auto racing in the country held every Friday night, our annual county fair in June, weekly go kart racing programs through the summer, horse shows, and barrel race events. The 4-H program uses the fairgrounds often during the summer months. We have hosted class reunions, employee appreciation events, theater productions, and a variety of other events for the community. Finding additional funding that would help us improve our facilities and make them more desirable to the community would be very helpful.

We strongly support a DO PASS recommendation for HB 1591. We believe that this would help many county fairs across the state of North Dakota repair and improve the facilities they operate and help the communities they serve. We believe this is would be a win for all involved.

Mark Landa
Board Secretary
Greater Grand Forks Fair and Exhibition