

**Testimony of Roz Leighton**  
In Support of  
**2025 House Bill 1001**  
**Office of the Governor**  
**Presented to House Appropriations Education and Environment Committee**  
**Representative Nathe, Chairman**  
**Friday, January 17, 2025**

Chairman Nathe and members of the Education and Environment Committee, I am Roz Leighton serving as Chief of Staff for the Governor and am here to ask for your support for the budget recommendation for the Office of the Governor.

### **Salaries and Wages**

- This request would continue funding our office at current compensation levels and takes into account the proposed Executive Compensation Plan and fully funded health insurance for state employees.
- Additionally, our request includes an additional \$20,000 for temporary salaries, for a total of \$50,000. Our goal is to develop a robust internship program and take advantage of the OMB matching program for interns. Over six years in Congress, we had 32 interns participate in our office's program. Participants went on to work at the Pentagon, attend law school, and even work for the State of North Dakota. We want to continue investing in the future of North Dakota's workforce and demonstrate firsthand the benefits of public service and being a part of State Government.
- Finally, there is a \$272,000 request for the compensation package for a Fargo-based employee. We have the open FTE but currently not the funding for salary and benefits. The request includes \$192,000 in salary and \$80,000 in fringe benefits. In keeping with the theme of the Governor's State of the State "Trying New Things," we would like to establish a branch of the Governor's Office in the state's most populous metro. To again reflect on the Governor's time representing the entire state in Congress, we found it extremely beneficial to have our State Director based in Fargo ensuring that the office had a presence at events and meetings on the eastern side of the state. Our State Director was able to represent the Congressman and engage with constituents when the Congressman was unable to attend due to commitments in Washington and other parts of the state. Our office prides ourselves on accessibility, and a Fargo office would ensure that people outside of Bismarck were also afforded that accessibility.

### **Governor's Salary**

- For the past three bienniums, the Governor's salary was a separate line item in the budget while the fringe benefits were included in the Salaries and Wages line item. The increase in this budget

is to bring the entirety of the Governor's compensation package onto the same line for efficiencies and transparency. This additional \$112,085 increase reflects moving the fringe benefits for the Governor from the regular salary and wages line to the Governor's salary line.

### **Operating Expenses**

- Our request includes an additional \$35,000 in travel, for a total of \$100,000. In the interest of transparency to the legislature and the public, we are requesting additional funding to accurately reflect the travel costs for all members of the Governor's Office.
- We have included a new request of \$30,000 for rent for the office in Fargo I described earlier. This amount was an estimate provided by the Office of Management and Budget based on similar state rental contracts in Fargo.
- We are requesting an additional \$21,000 for NDIT costs for licensing and monthly user fees for Copilot and Chat GPT. These AI tools will increase productivity and efficiencies for our team in research, managing workflow, summarizing legislation, and drafting communications.
- Finally, we have requested an additional \$15,000 in professional development opportunities. We are a new administration with a new staff, and we are committed to performing at the highest level possible. During the pandemic, most of these opportunities were virtual. However, those virtual options are becoming more limited, and while in-person options are more readily available, there is an increased expense. These opportunities include conferences such as Western Governors' Association and National Governors Association. Many states face similar issues as our own, and these development opportunities allow states to come together and find solutions to our most pressing problems.

### **Contingency**

- There is no change requested to this amount from the 2025-27 Base Level.

### **Children's Cabinet**

- The North Dakota Children's Cabinet, established by 2019 Senate Bill 2313, coordinates care for children across state agencies and tribal nations. The Cabinet takes a cross-system approach to addressing gaps and collaborating on services related to early education, physical and behavioral health, child welfare and juvenile justice. In addition to fulfilling its statutory duties, the Cabinet recognized the need for a strategic plan and technical assistance for long-term success. In fall 2023, North Dakota joined the Forum for Youth Investment's Children's Cabinet Network, and with the proposed legislation, Senate Bill 2176, there is intent to move the administration and programming within the Office of the Governor. While the Cabinet has made progress in improving outcomes for children and families and providing this budgetary support, it will allow the work to continue by ensuring the youth-serving systems are working as one to support children and families.
- We propose a one-time \$65,000 appropriation for facilitation experts, and \$35,000 ongoing appropriation to Cabinet members, for a total of \$100,000 this biennium.

### **Roughrider Awards**

- The budget for the Roughrider Award has been funded at \$10,800 per biennium for at least four bienniums. With an estimated two inductees per biennium, it is a challenge to cover the cost of

the portrait for the Hall of inductees, duplicate for the inductee, framing, the Theodore Roosevelt bust, and travel costs for the recipient if necessary. We propose the budget be increased \$4,200 to a total of \$15,000 to catch up on inflationary costs.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Education and Environment Subcommittee of Appropriations, I ask for your favorable consideration of our budget and am available, along with Office of Management and Budget staff, to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

