

TESTIMONY OF
BRIGADIER GENERAL MITCH JOHNSON
NORTH DAKOTA NATIONAL GUARD
BEFORE THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIVISION COMMITTEE
14 JANUARY 2025
HOUSE BILL 1018

Good morning, Chairman Nathe and members of the committee. For the record, I am Mitch Johnson, the Adjutant General for the North Dakota National Guard (NDNG). I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 1018, specifically the North Dakota Military Gallery project.

As you may recall, the concept for a military museum began when the 67th Legislative Assembly (2021-2022) granted the North Dakota National Guard Foundation authority to fundraise for a North Dakota Military Museum under House Bill 2016.

In the 68th Legislative session, the project was carried by the Office of the Adjutant General in Senate Bill 2016 but was transferred to the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND) budget at the end of session. The project was approved for \$20M dollar line of credit through the Bank of North Dakota with the “intent that the State Historical Society of North Dakota request funding from the 69th Legislative Assembly from the legacy earnings funds to repay the line of credit”, as per Senate Bill 2018. It was also recommended last session that the facility be located on the capitol grounds as an addition to the current North Dakota Heritage Center and State Museum. The initial concept design was approved unanimously in 2023 by the Capitol Grounds Planning Commission, and in August 2024 the commission unanimously approved the architectural design development drawings.

The Office of the Adjutant General remains a committed strategic partner in this project as outlined in the October 2022 Memorandum of Agreement between the Office of the Adjutant General and the State Historical Society of North Dakota. The goal of the project is to build a world class facility with exhibits and experiences that tell the story of our North Dakota military history.

The North Dakota National Guard Foundation remains the fundraising lead on this project and has contracted with PACE Fundraising to manage the capital campaign. Since last session, the Joint Military Museum Advisory Council (JMMAC) was created to provide oversight and collaboration for the project. This board has representation from the Governor’s Office, Office of Management and Budget, Office of the Adjutant General, State Historical Society of North Dakota and their Foundation, North Dakota National Guard Foundation, and several sub-committees including a Tribal Advisory Committee that has representation from all five Tribal Nations.

Creating a military museum in North Dakota has been a goal of the North Dakota National Guard for over 50 years. The State of North Dakota has a rich military history and heritage that needs to be preserved and shared. North Dakota is one of the few states that does not have a state military museum.

The Gallery facility will showcase the military in North Dakota as well as the North Dakotans who have served in all branches of the Armed Forces. It will HONOR our rich military history of those that have served. It will EDUCATE our citizens about North Dakota's role in preserving our national security. We hope it will INSPIRE future generations to serve their state and nation in support our all-volunteer force.

Thank you for your past support of this project and I ask for your continued support of the North Dakota Military Gallery. I will stand by for any questions.