



January 14, 2025

Chairman Nathe and House Appropriations- Education and Environment Committee Members,

We are writing in support of House Bill 1020, which seeks to allocate funding for general counsel to the Department of Water Resources. This measure is essential to safeguarding North Dakota's water rights, a cornerstone of our industries and our state's future.

Water is not only a vital natural resource but also a foundation of economic stability in North Dakota. Our agriculture, energy, and industrial sectors depend on reliable access to water to sustain operations, drive economic growth, and support thousands of jobs. Threats to our state's water rights—whether through federal overreach, interstate disputes, or other external pressures—put these industries and the livelihoods they support at risk.

In recent years, we have seen increasing challenges to state control over water resources, including proposed federal regulations that could undermine our authority. The complexity and significance of these issues demand legal expertise and dedicated resources. The Department of Water Resources requires general counsel with the specific mandate to defend against these threats, ensuring that North Dakota retains the authority to manage its water for the benefit of its citizens and industries.

This is not just about protecting a resource; it's about defending North Dakota's sovereignty, securing economic stability, and preserving our ability to grow and innovate. Without this investment in legal counsel, we risk losing the ability to effectively counter regulatory and legal challenges that could have far-reaching consequences for our state.

I urge you to support HB1020 and to provide the Department of Water Resources with the tools it needs to protect North Dakota's water rights and ensure the continued success of our industries and communities.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jonathan Fortner
VP of Government Relations
Lignite Energy Council