

March 17, 2025

Testimony of Stephanie Schoenrock
Visit Minot

Testimony in Support of SB 2018 and Funding for the Destination Development Grant

Chairman Nathe and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I am here to respectfully request your support for SB 2018 and funding for the Destination Development Grant.

We have a significant opportunity to improve how North Dakota attracts and engages visitors, and my perspective on this has profoundly evolved over the past five years, particularly since I began interacting with travelers daily at the Minot Visitor Center.

When I first transitioned from marketing events/tourism to working directly with visitors, I, like many community leaders, often wondered, *Where are these tourists?* That question was quickly answered. By June 30th last year, the Minot Visitor Center welcomed guests from all 50 states and 27 countries. It was eye-opening to witness firsthand the volume and diversity of travelers exploring North Dakota. Statistics can only tell part of the story; it's these countless personal interactions that shift perceptions.

Consistently, we hear three key themes from visitors:

1. **Escape from Crowds:** Travelers choose North Dakota to avoid the overcrowding common in many popular destinations, particularly National Parks.
2. **Part of a Larger Journey:** For most, North Dakota is a stopover rather than the primary destination.
3. **Surprise and Delight:** Visitors often find themselves unexpectedly captivated by their experience and leave wishing they had allocated more time to explore. Their enjoyment highlights a missed opportunity—one that could be transformed into longer stays and return visits with further destination development.

These insights highlight both a challenge and an opportunity. North Dakota has a compelling story to tell, but we need the resources to tell it more effectively. Funding for SB2018 and the Destination Development Grant is critical in ensuring we can promote our state, develop tourism infrastructure, and encourage longer stays, all while delivering a measurable return on investment. This is not a handout—it's a smart investment in our economy and communities.

Thank you for considering this important request. I urge you to support SB 2018 and the Destination Development Grant to help us realize the full potential of North Dakota's tourism industry.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Schoenrock