

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 2035

My name is Joe Barsh. I am the Executive Director of the Williston Parks & Recreation District and President of the North Dakota Recreation and Parks Association. I submit this testimony in strong opposition to Senate Bill 2035, which seeks to redefine "educational organizations" and "public-spirited organizations" impacting eligibility for charitable gaming. This bill jeopardizes vital funding streams crucial for enhancing community quality of life in Williston and across North Dakota.

Impact of SB 2035 on Williston

The Williston Parks & Recreation District (WPRD) and the Williston Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) rely significantly on charitable gaming revenue to support essential programs, events, and capital projects. These funds are instrumental in improving the quality of life for Williston residents and driving positive economic impact. A collaborative partnership between the WPRD and CVB leverages these funds to provide necessary resources for community organizations, fostering exceptional events and enriching our community. These partnerships benefit both residents and visitors alike. The current legislative framework governing charitable gaming effectively serves the best interests of our community. SB 2035 threatens this established and successful system.

Examples of Funding Impact

The elimination of "Tourism and Economic Development" from the definition of eligible organizations severely undermines the CVB's ability to secure funding and jeopardize existing projects and future initiatives.

Examples of programs significantly impacted include:

- **Ballin' in the Basin:** This annual youth basketball tournament attracts 80-100 teams twice yearly, injecting significant economic activity into Williston. Annual support from gaming funds exceeds \$5,000 per event.
- **Youth State Hockey Tournaments:** These tournaments attract teams and spectators, generating revenue for local businesses and bolstering community spirit.
- **Legion/Babe Ruth Summer Invitationals:** These events bring teams and families to Williston, contributing significantly to the local economy.
- **Babe Ruth World Series Tournaments:** Williston has hosted four World Series tournaments since 2003, with another scheduled for 2027. The gaming contribution to these tournaments represents a \$50,000 pledge for each event.

Conclusion

The removal of "Tourism and Economic Development" from the definition of eligible organizations creates uncertainty regarding future funding and directly impacts the WPRD's and CVB's ability to provide crucial community services and support economic development. This legislation threatens to severely limit funding for major community projects and events, hindering long-term planning and investment in Williston's growth.

I urge a "DO NOT PASS" vote on Senate Bill 2035 to protect vital funding streams that enhance the quality of life and economic vitality of our community. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joe Barsh

Executive Director, Williston Parks & Recreation District

President, North Dakota Recreation and Parks Association