

January 31, 2025

Chairperson Headland and Committee Members,

My name is Kimberly Gaugler, I have had the pleasure of serving as the Auditor of the City of Beach, North Dakota since 1994. I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 1524. Regional councils across the State are essential to the success of North Dakota's rural communities, by providing technical expertise, project management, and funding assistance that small towns often lack. HB 1524 ensures that regional councils have the stable resources needed to continue helping rural areas access critical funding and successfully implement development projects.

North Dakota's rural communities face unique challenges in securing funding for economic development, infrastructure, and essential services. Regional councils can help level the playing field by guiding communities through complex grant applications and project administration, ensuring that they can take full advantage of available state and federal funding sources. Without this support, many small towns would struggle to compete for funding opportunities that are vital to their long-term sustainability.

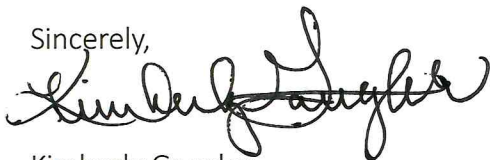
This bill aligns with Senate Bill 2225, which dedicates \$50 million to housing infrastructure with rural set-asides. Regional councils will play a crucial role in helping communities access these funds, navigate project development, and meet reporting requirements. Additionally, councils assist with workforce development initiatives, helping small towns build solid applications and develop partnerships that strengthen their local economies and build resilient communities.

Furthermore, regional councils contribute to the success of essential rural businesses, including grocery stores, which are supported under Senate Bill 2228. By providing financial and business planning assistance, regional councils help sustain these critical services, preventing further economic decline in rural areas.

By supporting HB 1524, the legislature is making a direct investment in the future of North Dakota's rural communities. Stable funding for regional councils means stronger local economies, improved infrastructure, and increased opportunities for small towns to grow and thrive. I personally, appreciate the decade's long relationship with Roosevelt Custer Regional Council, and the support they have provided over the years. I urge you to support this bill and ensure that regional councils can continue their vital work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Gaugler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "K".

Kimberly Gaugler
Auditor, City of Beach