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**Testimony of Britt Jacobson in support of HB 1524**

**To the House Finance and Taxation Committee**

**February 4, 2025**

Chairman Headland, Vice Chairman Hagert, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Britt Jacobson and I am the Practice Manager at Golden Valley Veterinary Clinic in Park River, ND, where I manage a mixed-animal veterinary practice employing 18 people in our rural community, providing services throughout the northeastern corner of North Dakota. I am writing in support of HB 1524.

As a rural business, we have significant workforce recruitment and retention challenges, primarily around housing and childcare. These issues are challenges for many rural communities and they are complicated issues to address without financial resources and the professional support to organize and coordinate the needed projects.

My husband, Nathan Kjelland, DVM, and I bought Golden Valley Veterinary Clinic as a thriving rural practice 10 years ago. The Red River Regional Council provided a new business loan investing in our new business. Eight years later, when we built a new state-of-the art veterinary clinic in the same community, the Red River Regional Council again supported us with a loan for new technology in the new facility. These funding resources have been critical for our success as a growing rural business providing essential veterinary care in our rural communities.

As our business continues to grow, we find it increasingly challenging to hire the highly trained professionals we need to serve our clients. Many young professionals are looking to relocate to rural areas. However, the lack of childcare and housing makes it difficult for us to attract and keep young professionals. Our communities are struggling to address these complex challenges. We need help from the Regional Councils to lead these efforts by coordinating, planning, and helping

fund significant community investments in rural places. Our rural communities have not been able to effectively address these challenges on our own.

The Red River Regional Council has already been a leader on many of these issues in our rural communities, providing vision and helping pull communities and resources together to address these very significant challenges. I serve on one of the Red River Regional Council advisory committees for Real. Good. NE ND, the state's first rural regional workforce attraction initiative. The regional marketing materials are helpful when interviewing candidates and talking about the many things our region has to offer potential employees. The future of this initiative is unknown due to funding instability. The initial grant was for development and start up, but did not include funding for the long-term implementation of the project.

Unfortunately, this is frequently the case with the work of the Regional Councils. Projects are often short-term due to lack of long-term financial support from our state and federal governments. The Regional Councils have pieced together enough funding to continue to do this vital work, but it continues to be a challenge to find sustainable funding for organizational capacity and leadership. Our rural communities have so much to offer, but without the vision and leadership of the Regional Councils, we will struggle to meet the workforce needs right now and in the future.

I appreciate the state-wide efforts to increase the available workforce with the concierge portal and other efforts. However, we need to have efforts that address the very specific needs of different regions in the state as well. This is where the Regional Councils excel.

Recently, the Red River Regional Council helped secure funding for a new housing development right here in Park River, ND. They also helped secure funding for a new childcare center in conjunction with our local school district. And this is the progress we are seeing in one rural North Dakota town. These Regional Councils have the potential to positively impact rural communities throughout our state.

In closing, I urge you to support this critical funding bill with a "Do Pass" to help our rural communities and rural businesses flourish today and in the future!

Thank you for your consideration of this important bill. Please contact me if you have any questions.

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