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HB 1524 Testimony in Support House Finance & Tax Committee February 4, 2025

Chairman and Members of the House Finance & Tax Committee:

My name is Tony Grindberg, and I am here to express my strong support for House Bill 1524, which seeks to provide long-overdue state support for North Dakota's regional council network. For 50 years, these councils have diligently served the state without state funding, addressing critical regional needs and fostering collaboration to achieve strategic outcomes for North Dakota.

The regional council system was established half a century ago to serve as a vital conduit for local, state, and federal collaboration. Through their efforts, these councils have brought countless benefits to our communities, including facilitating economic development, supporting infrastructure projects, and enhancing workforce development initiatives. Yet, despite their demonstrated value, they have operated without direct state funding, relying instead on inconsistent and often inadequate resources.

House Bill 1524 offers a transformative opportunity to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of these regional councils by providing a mechanism for state support. By requiring councils to submit biannual work plans aligned with North Dakota's strategic goals, this legislation establishes a clear framework for accountability and measurable outcomes. This approach not only benefits the state but also provides stability for long-term impacts and consistent support across all regions.

HB 1524 will enable these councils to:

1. **Leverage Resources More Effectively:** With state support, councils can maximize federal and local funding opportunities, ensuring that every dollar is used efficiently to benefit North Dakota communities.
2. **Enhance Strategic Planning:** The biannual work plans required by this legislation will ensure that council activities align with the state's priorities, driving measurable progress toward shared goals.
3. **Provide Stability:** Long-term state support will allow councils to focus on proactive, strategic initiatives rather than operating in a reactive, resource-constrained manner.
4. **Foster Regional Collaboration:** By strengthening the councils, HB 1524 will enhance their ability to bring together local governments, businesses, and community organizations to address regional challenges collaboratively.

The passage of HB 1524 represents a critical investment in North Dakota's future. It ensures that the regional council network, a system that has already proven its value over five decades, can continue to serve as a cornerstone of the state's development strategy. Moreover, it demonstrates the legislature's commitment to fostering equitable growth and opportunity across all regions of our state.

I urge this committee to support HB 1524 and provide the necessary state funding to sustain and strengthen North Dakota's regional councils. Together, we can build a more resilient, prosperous, and united North Dakota.

Thank you for your consideration.