



Roosevelt Custer
REGIONAL COUNCIL

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**Testimony of Teran Doerr
Roosevelt Custer Regional Council
In Favor House Bill 1524
February 4, 2025**

Chairman Headland and Members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1524. This bill is an investment in North Dakota's communities, ensuring they have the expertise to access funding, implement projects, and grow. The funding in this bill is not for regional councils, it is for the communities we serve. Many small towns do not have experts to help them apply for grants, manage projects, or plan for the future. When that happens, funding goes unclaimed, and opportunities are lost. Regional councils help communities cut through the complexity, making sure these dollars reach the people and places that need them most.

Before July 2022, our regional council struggled, and our communities lost out on millions of dollars in grants and projects. Since then, we have helped secure Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) for critical projects in Mott, Regent, Medora, and Bowman. We have assisted businesses and communities in accessing USDA and EDA grants for economic development and future tourism investments. We helped secure a Department of Energy grant for a rural fire department in Amidon. When Sanford closed its rural nursing home in Mott, we assisted in securing funding to reopen the clinic and basic care facility, and when the project fell short, we helped find an additional \$200,000 to complete it. We have also supported childcare, workforce, and housing initiatives across our region. The return on investment is clear: for every dollar invested in regional councils, we bring in multiple dollars through grants, private investment, and economic development. Without dedicated funding for grant writing, project management, and technical assistance, many communities will not have the capacity to take advantage of these opportunities.

The state is making major investments in workforce, housing, childcare, and economic development. But funding alone does not make projects happen, someone has to put the pieces together. That is what regional councils do. When the Rural Workforce Impact Program (RWIP) first launched, we brought stakeholders together, helped them apply, and ensured funding aligned with regional needs. However, when later rounds allowed open applications without coordination, communities struggled to apply, and money was left on the table. The need was there, but without guidance, many small communities did not apply.

Housing is another example. We are currently overseeing a state grant for removing dilapidated properties. This single project has required over 100 hours of work, including legal navigation, contractor coordination, and compliance. Small towns do not have the capacity to take on this level of complexity alone. Developing a full-scale housing project, securing land, finding funding, and managing construction, requires expertise that many communities simply do not have.

The same is true for childcare. The state is making historic investments in childcare, but funding alone will not fix the issue. Communities need help planning, applying, and ensuring their programs are successful long-term. Without this support, some areas may struggle to turn funding into real, lasting solutions.

A great example of how this process can work well is the Livestock Planning Grant. The North Dakota Ag Department funded regional councils to coordinate outreach, facilitate applications, and hire contractors. As a result, the program was successfully implemented across the state. The difference? This program provided funding to regional councils to support their work. When that funding is absent, regional councils are still expected to assist, but without the resources to do so effectively.

Right now, multiple bills in this legislative session are focused on rural investment. Funding for workforce programs, housing, childcare, and economic development is on the table. But none of these investments will succeed if communities do not have the expertise and support to access them.

Regional councils have a long history of turning small investments into big results by helping communities develop strategic plans for long-term growth, secure and layer funding from multiple sources, and implement and manage projects to ensure funding is used effectively.

This is not just a funding bill, it is a commitment to making sure rural investments actually happen. Without continued investment, many small communities will continue to struggle while larger cities get ahead. HB 1524 ensures that every region has the tools to make the most of state and federal dollars. I urge you to support this bill so that North Dakota's small towns can keep growing and thriving.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Teran Doerr