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**Testimony of Lance Gaebe
North Dakota Farmers Union
In Support of HB 1524
House Finance and Tax Committee
February 4, 2025**

Chairman Headland and members of the Finance and Taxation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the members of North Dakota Farmers Union in strong support of House Bill No. 1524. I am Lance Gaebe.

At our most recent annual convention, our members identified several key priorities for this legislative session, including investments in childcare, rural food access, affordable housing, and rural economic development. We recognize that the future of agriculture is inextricably linked to the vitality of our rural communities. We believe that strategic investments in effective regional councils are essential for fostering rural economic development and comprehensive infrastructure planning.

HB 1524 directly supports the coordination efforts of these regional councils, which work tirelessly to improve the quality of life for rural residents and enhance our communities. The professional staff of these councils provide invaluable technical assistance and services to communities, including support for local planning initiatives, organizational assistance, workforce development programs, grant writing assistance, capacity building, and coordination with other regional and state-level initiatives. These services empower communities to not just survive but to also thrive.

We believe that the long-term benefits of supporting regional councils far outweigh the initial investment and will generate returns to the state in additional economic activity.

North Dakota Farmers Union urges your favorable consideration of HB 1524. We believe this bill is a critical step towards strengthening rural communities and ensuring a bright future for North Dakota agriculture. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.