

**Testimony of Cole Higlin
North Dakota Recreation & Park Association
To House Finance & Taxation Committee
In Opposition to HB 1572
Wednesday, January 29, 2025**

Chairman Headland and members of the Committee, my name is Cole Higlin, and I am the public policy chair of the North Dakota Recreation & Park Association (NDRPA). We represent more than 900 members, primarily park districts, and work to advance parks, recreation and conservation for an enhanced quality of life in North Dakota.

We oppose the Section 5 amendment in this bill, which places a \$1 million cap on general obligation bonds for park districts. While the intent behind this provision may be to ensure fiscal responsibility, the \$1 million limit is excessively restrictive and fails to meet the diverse funding needs of park districts, particularly those in larger municipalities or communities with significant park demands. Many park systems require multi-phase projects that span several years and involve substantial financial commitments. The \$1 million cap would be detrimental to park districts' ability to address both immediate and future needs in a comprehensive manner. Consequently, park districts may be forced to rely on special assessments.

Regarding taxpayer protection, it's important to note that a 60-day protest period is already in place, which gives the public ample opportunity to file a formal protest. This ensures that the process is not solely driven by park boards without public input. The resolution is published, and the protest period is fully carried out before any bonds are issued, guaranteeing that constituents have a voice in the decision-making process.

Park districts should retain the flexibility to issue bonds that align with their specific needs and financial conditions. While other political subdivisions have a limit of five percent of assessed value, park districts currently have a much lower cap of one percent of assessed valuation. This distinction allows park districts to undertake large-scale, long-term projects that reflect their unique goals and priorities, rather than being constrained by an arbitrary and one-size-fits-all cap.

In conclusion, we respectfully urge the committee to remove the \$1 million cap on general obligation bonds for park districts as outlined in Section 5 of HB 1572. Thank you for your time and consideration. We would be happy to address any questions you may have.