

Good morning, Chairman Schauer, and members of the House Government and Veterans Affairs

Committee. My name is Neal Messer and I currently serve as Chairman of the Stark County Commission. I am submitting testimony in opposition of HB 1306.

As written, HB 1306 changes the current Open Records Request statute where we as public entities are currently required to provide the first hour of work generated from an open records request to FOURTY (40) free hours of work for per request each year to any citizen of North Dakota. The rate of increase for open records requests have skyrocketed in recent years. Stark County has worked very hard and spent an enormous amount of time and money in recent years to drastically increase our transparency to our citizens. We have expanded the platforms of our meeting availability to include live and taped audio, live video that includes a YouTube broadcast, and recorded video availability from both our county website and our community channel on our local cable provider. We consistently receive compliments of how much our citizens appreciate the ability to have access to our meetings.

The responsibility of receiving and complying with Open Records Requests in Stark County falls to our Auditor and States Attorney. They have also submitted written testimony and I encourage you to review the details that each request requires and receives.

From a County Commissioner perspective, I can tell you that our Elected States Attorney and Auditor agree that if the rate of Open Records Requests continue to increase dramatically, that we will need additional resources to make sure we can comply with those requests in a timely fashion and, with the likelihood of us looking down the barrel of spending caps tied to property tax relief, HB 1306 would in all likelihood would reduce our ability to perform other county functions (such as prosecutions) without hiring additional staff.

For all the reasons stated, I strongly encourage you to defeat HB1306.

Thank you for your time.

Neal Messer

Stark County Commissioner

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