

Testimony of Laura Lacher
Economic Development Association of North Dakota
In Opposition of HB 1141
January 27, 2025

Chair Warrey and members of the House Industry, Business and Labor Committee:

My name is Laura Lacher, executive director of the Economic Development Association of North Dakota (EDND) which represents more than 80 economic development organizations working to build vibrant communities and drive economic growth across our state. On behalf of our members, I am here to express our opposition to HB 1141.

While transparency and accountability in the use of public resources are principles we fully support, this bill raises significant concerns about unintended consequences. By restricting the use of public funds for participation in organizations that have taken positions on ballot measures or candidates within the past decade, this bill could severely hinder essential collaboration between public entities and private organizations. Partnerships for us with groups like North Dakota League of Cities, Greater North Dakota Chamber and Association of Counties are essential for addressing key challenges such as workforce development, infrastructure improvements, and economic diversification.

It is important to emphasize that organizations like EDND do not use public funds for political advocacy. Membership dues paid by public entities are used to provide education, training, networking, and resources that directly benefit members communities. These funds enable public entities to access valuable tools and best practices, navigate state and federal programs, and foster partnerships that address critical issues in the state.

By restricting public entities from participating in membership organizations, HB 1141 would sever essential connections and deprive communities of the resources that could help them succeed. Advocacy in the best interests of members is a vital function of organizations like EDND, but it is not funded by public dollars. Instead, public investments in membership are directed toward delivering measurable value and ensuring public entities are well-equipped to address complex issues.

This bill, if passed, would unnecessarily limit the tools available to cities, counties and other political subdivisions, ultimately making it harder to deliver meaningful economic progress. For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue a "Do Not Pass" recommendation on HB 1141.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.