

## TESTIMONY OF LISA EDISON-SMITH IN SUPPORT OF HB1438

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members,

My name is Lisa Edison-Smith and I offer this testimony in support of House Bill 1438, a measure to provide funding to the North Dakota State Historical Society from which to provide a matching grant to the historic Fargo Theatre for the purpose of needed restoration to the Theatre.

The Fargo Theatre was completed in 1925 and is approaching its centennial anniversary of operations in 2026. The Fargo Theatre is a community treasure, and its marquee serves as a recognizable landmark and reminder of the rich history and contemporary vibrance not only of Fargo, but the entire state of North Dakota.

The Theatre itself is a beautiful example of art deco design and a hub of activity for the arts and events for the entire region. The building is home not only to first-run and classic films, silent movies, and the famed Fargo Film Festival, it also provides live stage and community events throughout the year.

I am a proud current Board member of the Fargo Theatre and have previously served as President of its volunteer Board. Through my work with the Fargo Theatre, I have seen first-hand the impact the organization and its dedicated staff have not just on the arts community, but the entire community of Fargo and state of North Dakota. From hosting groups of school children to corporate events, the Fargo Theatre is a vital historic and enrichment link that draws people to the state and region. It reflects both the state's history and tradition, as well as the renewed vibrance of its cities and communities.

During my time as President, the expense of preserving and maintaining such an historic architectural gem became apparent to me. Not only must funds be invested in everyday maintenance, but the Theatre must also be updated to provide enhanced and improved accessibility features to allow members of the public with mobility, audio, and visual restrictions to share in the events offered. As an example, a long-time friend and former co-worker reached out to me regarding the need for enhanced access after her husband became dependent on a wheelchair. Funding is critical to ensure that all members of the community and state are able to share in the offerings of the Fargo Theatre.

The Fargo Theatre, its truly amazing staff, and supporters are engaging in fundraising efforts to ensure that this historical treasure continues to shine and reflect the vibrancy of Fargo and all of North Dakota. HB 1438 provides appropriations for critical matching funding to allow adequate funding for the Fargo Theatre in its next century that will benefit all North Dakotans.

I encourage the Committee to pass HB 1438.

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