

# Testimony for HB 1438 Historic Preservation Grant for the Fargo Theatre

from Rep. Karla Rose Hanson  
for the House Industry, Business & Labor Committee on 1/21/25

Chairman Warrey and members of the House IBL Committee,

My name is Rep. Karla Rose Hanson. Today, along with my two colleagues who represent District 44, I am bringing to you House Bill 1438. This bill would provide an appropriation to the ND Historical Society for a matching grant to restore the historic Fargo Theatre.

The Fargo Theatre is a treasure. It was placed on the National Register for Historic Places by the US Department of the Interior, AND it is one of the hottest attractions in Fargo.

The theater is an iconic representation of Fargo's vibrant downtown. Visitors don't miss the chance to take photos in front of this beautiful theater and its classic marquee. In fact, it's one of the most photographed landmarks in North Dakota. The interior of the theater is a stunning example of art deco style.

The Fargo Theatre is a busy venue for new-release movies and live events such as concerts, ballet productions and comedy shows. A major highlight every year is the Fargo Film Festival, a 5-day event featuring more than 100 films and 40+ visiting filmmakers. The theater also hosts 8 specialty film festivals each year, plus dozens of private events for businesses and non-profits and dozens of field trips for students. Each year, the Fargo Theatre attracts about 80,000 visitors in total.


Next year, the Fargo Theatre will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. To mark this milestone, a capital campaign is being planned to refurbish this historic building and update its production equipment. The Fargo Theatre, which is a non-profit organization, plans to raise \$5.5 million for this project. This appropriation request of \$1.1 million represents 20% of that goal and requires a 1:1 match from private donors. This is a one-time appropriation, not an ongoing expense.

This matching grant to the Fargo Theatre will serve as a catalyst for private donations to maximize the impact of the capital campaign. The state's investment in preserving this architectural gem will ensure it continues to be a treasure in our state for years to come, continuing to spark community pride, economic activity and arts programming.

The North Dakota Historical Society budget is being heard in the E&E section of House Appropriations now. My ask of this committee is to give HB 1438 a do-pass recommendation so it can be forwarded to our section and be considered in the context of the other requests from the Historical Society, including other potential historical preservation grants.

I have invited Emily Beck, the executive director of the Fargo Theatre, to testify today to go into detail about this historic landmark, the need to refurbish the building and update its production equipment, the events it hosts, and the exciting future possibilities with the state's assistance of its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday capital campaign.

In closing, please give HB 1438 a do-pass recommendation and re-referral to the E&E section of Appropriations for additional consideration. Thank you!

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