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**Testimony of
Lance Gaebe
North Dakota Farmers Union**

**to: Special Legislative Session Joint Appropriations Committee
January 21, 2026**

Chairmen Vigesaa and Bekkedahl and members of the joint appropriations committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill No 1623. My name is Lance Gaebe, I represent North Dakota Farmers Union and I submit this testimony on behalf of our members. We support HB 1623 and its appropriation of \$397.9 million of federal funds for Rural Health Transformation Program functions and grants.

During NDFU's recent annual convention, our members adopted special orders of business outlining our policy priorities. Among these priorities is targeted and effective funding through the Rural Health Transformation Program. North Dakota Farmers Union supports efforts to strengthen rural health systems and ensures that federal investments improve access, workforce capacity, and long-term sustainability in rural communities.

With this funding, we ask the Legislature and North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services to:

- Address agricultural community needs, including emergency services, mental health, prenatal care, and telehealth.
- Prioritize rural and underserved communities in fund distribution, particularly areas lacking basic emergency services or experiencing severe provider shortages.
- Establish clear definitions of "rural" to ensure funds intended for truly remote areas, not be redirected to regional centers with adequate health infrastructure.
- Support community-based solutions that empower local health systems rather than consolidate services in regional centers.

NDFU respectfully requests approval of the transformative funding in HB 1623. We look forward to working with policy makers and the Department of Health and Human Services to provide measurable improvements in rural health, emergency services and sustainable communities.