



Testimony of Laura Lacher
Economic Development Association of North Dakota
In Support of SB 2390
March 13, 2025

Chairman Longmuir and members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee:

My name is Laura Lacher, I am the executive director of the Economic Development Association of North Dakota (EDND). EDND represents economic development professionals across the state who work to strengthen communities, grow our economy, and improve the quality of life in North Dakota. SB 2390 supports these goals by establishing the Rural Catalyst Committee, a fund to help rural communities invest in important local projects.

Rural communities are the foundation of North Dakota's economy, and investing in their future is critical to keeping our state strong. This program will provide much-needed funding for projects in areas like arts and culture, economic development, education, and health. These investments will help small towns remain vibrant, competitive, and attractive places to live and work.

EDND appreciates the recent efforts to build capacity in rural communities through regional councils. This support is critical because capacity is often the greatest need in project development, helping communities navigate complex funding sources, plan for long-term sustainability, and successfully implement initiatives. However, even with increased capacity, there remains a significant funding gap for getting projects completed. Many rural communities can plan and develop projects but struggle to secure the final dollars necessary to bring them to fruition. SB 2390 helps fill that gap by providing essential funding to move projects across the finish line.

We also appreciate two key provisions in this bill. First, we support the requirement for communities to contribute matching funds. Even a small match shows local buy-in and commitment, ensuring that communities are engaged in their own success. Encouraging local investment also helps attract additional funding and partnerships.

Second, we support the population eligibility threshold of 8,500 residents. North Dakota has 355 cities, but only nine have more than 8,500 people. This program ensures that rural communities of all sizes have access to resources that support growth, opportunity, and a strong quality of life.

SB 2390 is an important step in strengthening rural North Dakota. The Rural Catalyst Grant Program will help communities improve quality of life, attract and retain workforce, and create new economic opportunities. EDND urges the committee to give this bill a “Do Pass” recommendation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.