

**TESTIMONY
HOUSE BILL 1614
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 13, 2025**

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee, my name is Scott Meske. I appear on behalf of the North Dakota Motor Carriers Association (NDMCA) in opposition to HB 1614.

The NDMCA represents the hundreds of companies and thousands of professionals who efficiently and safely move goods and services in North Dakota across our highways and roads. The motor carrier industry is one of the most regulated sectors of our transportation system. According to a recent NDSU Challey Institute study, North Dakota is THE most freight dependent state in our country, with 60% of our economy relying on surface transportation in one form or another. In fact, in October 2024, an autonomous transportation conference was held in Bismarck, bringing together experts from the industry, companies who are employing autonomous trucks in other parts of the country, insurance specialists, and law enforcement. The curious point of that conference is that there were possibly more questions raised than answers given.

Without question autonomous technology is an emerging field in the freight delivering business. There are tremendous advancements being made to ensure that the use of such technologies actually improves efficiency and reliability while remaining safe for the traveling public. Other testimony has been submitted that details some of the trials currently being conducted by or being considered by North Dakota companies. We must allow these companies to innovate in a way that makes sense for them. And our concern is that if passed, HB 1614 could seriously hinder those efforts.

Placing a definition of autonomous truck within our Century Code at this stage of industry development is premature and could have an adverse effect on our companies and the testing they are exploring. Employing autonomous trucks shows promise of addressing workforce shortages and even reducing motor vehicle accidents. But we have to allow the industry to continue their research and testing. As written, this bill puts into Code a definition that we believe is not warranted nor needed at this time. We are particularly concerned with Section 2, as the definition may not be the right approach to address all of the issues surrounding this opportunity for the trucking industry.

Going forward, the NDMCA would gladly be a part of the discussion that helps update our motor vehicle laws to include autonomous trucking, including all stakeholders and law enforcement in that effort. We DO need a definition and reasonable regulatory framework to keep the traveling public safe, while allowing our companies to employ this exciting technology. Let's not handcuff the industry before it even gets started.

This concludes my testimony. NDMCA urges the Committee to issue a DO NOT PASS recommendation on HB 1614, and I would be happy to answer any questions, although I believe there are others following me who might be more suitable to answer technical questions.

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