

**Board of County  
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January 29, 2025

Chairman Ron Sorvaag  
Senate Appropriations – Education & Environmental Division  
North Dakota State Capitol  
600 East Boulevard  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0360

RE: SB 2002-Amendment Requested

Chairman Sorvaag and Members of the Senate Appropriations – Education & Environmental Division:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2002 and describe some of the challenges Cass County faces in meeting the facility needs of the East Central Judicial District (ECJD). Cass County has been aggressive in recent years - trying to provide the Courts with space that is not just adequate, but well-appointed to allow the courts in the busiest district in North Dakota to operate at maximum efficiency.

The Cass County Courthouse currently has 8 courtrooms, three with secure access enabling judges and deputies escorting in-custody defendants to enter & exit without interacting with the public. The ECJD has 13 Judges and Referees.

Cass County has made significant investments in recent years trying to be responsive to the growing needs of the ECJD. The County is finalizing plans to convert our Information Technology office to a fourth secure courtroom at an approximate cost of \$1.1 million. The County is also conducting a space needs study to determine our overall space needs for the next 15 years. A key element of that study is identifying space in the Courthouse where additional courtrooms could be constructed. In 2020 & 2021 the County spent nearly \$400,000 to convert two smaller courtrooms into a single larger courtroom. This was in direct response to judicial requests for a courtroom that was both suitable for larger civil trials and could accommodate COVID-19 related social distancing recommendations.

Presently under North Dakota Century Code, operating cost recovery is not allowed. We request a change in century code and cost reimbursement is allowed for Counties with 8 or more courtrooms.

*27-01-01.1. Budgeting and financing of the supreme court and district courts. The state court administrator shall submit a comprehensive budget for the supreme court and the district courts to the legislative assembly. An informational copy of the budget must be delivered to the director of the budget pursuant to section 54-44.1-13. The budget for the district courts must include all salary and expenses for the district courts, including the juvenile courts, and their employees. Each county shall provide the district court in that county with adequate chamber, court, and law library quarters, and lights and fuel and appropriate facilities for clerk of court services that are state-funded pursuant to section 27-05.2-02. Any equipment, furnishings, and law libraries in the control and custody of the district court on January 1, 1980, and any such property acquired from that date until July 1, 1981, must continue to be in the district court's custody and control until the state court administrator determines such items are no longer needed by the court.*

Below is a summary of space Cass County taxpayers cover the facility costs for North Dakota's Court System. Using a market rate (\$7.00 sq/ft) for facility operating costs, the Cass County Commission covers annual costs of approximately \$438,904.69 for 62,700.67 sq/ft.

North Dakota Court System	55,514 sq/ft
<u>Underground Secure Parking</u>	<u>7,186 sq/ft</u>
Total	62,700 sq/ft

**Proposed Amendment:**

*County Operational Grants, the funds provided in this section, or so much of the funds as may be necessary up to \$900,000, are appropriated out of any moneys in the general fund in the state treasury, to the State Judicial Court system for the purpose of defraying the expenses for counties located in North Dakota with 8 or more courtrooms, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.*

We appreciate the committee's time and thoughtful consideration. Cass County is prepared to discuss specific ways we believe the State and County can partner to meet these critical needs.

Sincerely,

*Tony Grindberg*

Chairman Tony Grindberg  
Cass County Commission