



Respectfully Submitted by: Brent Ekstrom, Executive Director
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Chairman Wanzek and Members of the Senate Appropriations – Government Operations Division:

I am Brent Ekstrom, Executive Director of the Lewis & Clark Development Group, which is based in Mandan. Our mission is to advance economic and community development throughout North Dakota, and we do so through the work of our four subsidiaries: Lewis & Clark Regional Development Council, Lewis & Clark Certified Development Company, CommunityWorks North Dakota, and Lewis & Clark Property Management.

CommunityWorks North Dakota is our state's only chartered member of the congressional chartered NeighborWorks America (NWA) network – the nation's leader in creating opportunities for people to live in affordable housing and strengthen communities. Through Lewis & Clark Property Management, we manage and/or own 33 properties in 25 communities, which serve over 1,000 residents. Expanding affordable housing is at the heart of what we do.

Since 2021, I have had the honor of serving on the Affordable Housing Advisory Council of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines. Last summer, at the invitation of Governor Doug Burgum, I served on the Statewide Housing Initiative Advisory Committee, which collected invaluable insight into the scope of North Dakota's housing challenge.

From my perspective, SB 2225 is very much anchored in the recommendations of the Housing Initiative Advisory Committee. It presents a much-needed public-private partnership model to help tackle North Dakota's affordable housing challenge. I believe the strength of SB 2225 rests upon four pillars:

- 1) **Flexibility:** SB 2225 provides communities with flexibility to allow communities to determine the type of housing they most need. This ensures local control and that efforts are targeted and responsive to community housing needs.
- 2) **Tools:** By offering grants to political subdivisions for development, SB 2225 provides communities with critical tools to build public-private support for new housing projects.
- 3) **Equity:** SB 2225 allocates funding to communities based on population size. This guarantees that our often-overlooked smaller communities and rural areas have access to critical funding. I speak from experience when I state that our smaller municipalities struggle the most with the financial burden of infrastructure and housing development. SB 2225 strives to have growth distributed across North Dakota.
- 4) **Accountability:** By requiring a report to legislative management and the governor by June 30, 2026, SB 2224 ensures there is transparency and accountability. As such, we will understand the program's impact, including the number of housing units created, the amount of matching funds raised, and the overall success in meeting local needs.

In conclusion, I want to commend my fellow Housing Initiative Advisory Committee member, Senator Brad Bekkedahl, for taking the lead on this effort. By investing in infrastructure, empowering local communities to make housing decisions, and fostering public-private partnerships, SB 2225 lays a strong foundation for North Dakota to build upon.

I believe SB 2225 is a significant step toward meaningfully addressing the housing needs of communities of every size in our state. I urge the committee to support this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Brent Ekstrom, Executive Director

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