

HB 1012  
3-26-25



March 26, 2025

Chairman Dever and Members of the Senate Appropriations Human Resources Division,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 1012, and specifically in support for Section 32 of the amended bill. I am here on behalf of Bison World, a cultural and bison-themed destination tourist attraction designed for development along I-94 at Exit 258 in Jamestown. The state-owned parcels of land where Bison World would be located are north of the interstate and designated as State Hospital land. I served the State of North Dakota as the Superintendent of the North Dakota State Hospital from 1995 to 2015. During my tenure, no one approached the Hospital about leasing the land, which has been the case for several years. The property is currently not leased but is a good fit for the Bison World project.

### **About Bison World**

[Bison World](#) is envisioned as a premier tourist destination that celebrates North Dakota's cultural heritage, history of the bison, and capitalizes on a growing industry of niche tourism, offering true economic potential for North Dakota. The project aims to attract visitors from all around the nation, boost the state's tourism industry, and generate economic activity by leveraging underutilized state land.

### **The Need for a Long-Term Lease**

Under the current statute, lease renewals are limited to two-year terms. While this structure may have met past administrative needs, it creates significant barriers to attracting private investment for large-scale development into the future. Investors require stability and certainty before committing capital. Short-term leases introduce unnecessary risk, making it difficult to secure financing, plan long-term operations, or implement sustainable infrastructure.

A long-term lease would:

- **Encourage Private Investment** – Investors will only commit funds when they have sufficient time to recoup costs and generate returns.
- **Minimize Policy Risks** – A stable lease reduces the likelihood of policy changes disrupting any project, allowing for responsible planning and development.
- **Ensure Public-Private Balance** – The state retains ownership while benefiting from economic activity, infrastructure improvements, and increased public engagement with the site.

### **Proposed Legislative Amendment**

With the guidance of Jonathan Alm at the Department of Health and Human Services, we proposed amendment language in the House that grants the department the discretion to approve long-term leases, with a maximum term of 99 years. This is now Section 32 on page 15 of HB 1012. This flexibility would allow the state to evaluate projects on a case-by-case basis while ensuring long-term economic and community benefits. I've included the language at the bottom of my testimony.

## Conclusion

Over the past four years, we have worked diligently to finalize the design of Bison World, pursue state support, and attract private investment. This project will strengthen North Dakota's tourism industry, capture visitors from within and outside the state, stimulate economic activity on underutilized public land, and generate new revenue for the state.

Updating the statute to allow for a long-term lease is a practical solution that will unlock economic potential while ensuring the land remains a valuable asset for the state. We urge the committee's support for this amendment and thank you for your time and consideration.

Alex Schweitzer

Board Chairman, Bison World, Fund

18       **SECTION 32. AMENDMENT.** Section 50-06-06.6 of the North Dakota Century Code is  
19 amended and reenacted as follows:

20       **50-06-06.6. Department may lease real and personal property.**

21       The commissioner of the department or commissioner's designee may lease ~~surplus farm-~~  
22 ~~and pastureland at the state hospital and the life skills and transition center. The commissioner-~~  
23 ~~or designee also may enter into further leases of~~ real or personal property at the life skills and  
24 transition center or the state hospital upon a specific finding that the granting of each such  
25 leasehold interest will result in a net economic gain for the department, taking into account all  
26 identifiable costs. Any lease of space for the purpose of providing child care services must meet  
27 requirements as determined by the department. The commissioner of the department or  
28 commissioner's designee may prescribe the terms and conditions of any leases entered into  
29 pursuant to this section and may renew existing leases. ~~Any~~The term of any lease entered into-  
30 ~~must be subject to renewal or cancelable each biennium~~may not exceed ninety-nine years.