

Chairman Luick and members of the committee,

Thank you for considering my testimony. My name is Savanna Hendrickson, and I currently serve as the President of our county Economic Development Council and the President of a community bank that serves two rural communities in North Dakota. I'm writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 2097.

As someone deeply involved in the economic development and financial well-being of our rural communities, I witness firsthand the challenges we face daily. Issues such as economic development, infrastructure, housing, and job creation are persistent and pressing concerns that require substantial support to address effectively.

I grew up on a family farm and, after completing my education, returned to rural North Dakota to start a farming operation with my husband. We are committed to continuing this tradition and hope to involve future generations in our farming endeavors. This personal experience has given me a profound understanding of the importance of thriving rural communities.

Senate Bill 2097 proposes the creation of a Rural Community Endowment Fund, which is a critical step towards ensuring the long-term sustainability and prosperity of our rural areas. This fund will provide a reliable source of financial support for essential projects, including housing, workforce development, business recruitment, and infrastructure improvements.

Rural communities are the backbone of our state, providing essential services, economic opportunities, and a high quality of life for their residents. However, declining populations, aging infrastructure, and limited local resources pose significant challenges that threaten their viability. The Rural Community Endowment Fund will help address these challenges by offering grants to support projects that enhance the prosperity, independence, safety, health, and quality of life in rural communities.

The proposed \$50 million endowment fund, with \$5 million earmarked for immediate grants, will provide the necessary financial resources to support these vital projects. By investing in our rural communities, we can ensure they remain vibrant and resilient, capable of attracting new residents and businesses, and providing a high quality of life for their citizens.

As the President of a community bank, I understand the importance of financial stability and the need for strategic investments in our communities. The Rural Community Endowment Fund will not only support immediate needs but also provide long-term benefits by reducing the financial burden on local governments and taxpayers. This proactive approach will help prevent costly emergencies and stabilize local finances, ensuring that our small towns can thrive without overburdening their residents.

In conclusion, I urge you to pass Senate Bill 2097 and give North Dakota's rural communities the tools they need to succeed. This bill represents a significant investment in the future of our state, ensuring that our rural areas remain strong, vibrant, and capable of supporting the needs of their residents for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Savanna Hendrickson*

Savanna Hendrickson | savanna.hendrickson@outlook.com | 701-213-0601