
Good afternoon, Chairman Luick, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee. My name is Sandy Tibke, and I'm the director of Foundation for a Healthy North Dakota.

I stand before you today in full support of the proposed bill to create a Rural Community Endowment Fund in North Dakota. This innovative legislation has the potential to profoundly and lastingly impact our rural communities, fostering growth and sustainability for generations to come.

Importance of the Rural Community Endowment Fund

- 1. Long-Term Prosperity:** By establishing a permanent endowment fund dedicated to supporting rural communities, we can secure a brighter future for our residents. The fund will provide essential resources for local housing, infrastructure, business recruitment, and other community needs, ensuring the long-term prosperity of our rural areas.
- 2. Empowering Local Initiatives:** Creating a Rural Community Endowment Fund Committee, comprising individuals from rural communities and nonprofit organizations, will empower local stakeholders to drive positive change, spur job creation and boost small businesses. The committee can prioritize projects that enhance our residents' quality of life, safety, and independence through strategic grant allocations.
- 3. Accountability and Transparency:** The bill mandates regular reporting to the legislative management, ensuring transparency in fund utilization. This accountability mechanism will guarantee that the allocated funds are used effectively and efficiently to benefit our rural communities.

According to recent census data, seventy-five cities in North Dakota have populations of fewer than one thousand individuals, meeting the criteria for rural communities under this bill. Investing in these areas through the Rural Community Endowment Fund can address critical needs, stimulate economic development, and foster a sense of community pride among residents.

The proposed appropriation of \$50,000,000 from the general fund to the Rural Community Endowment Fund, along with an additional \$5,000,000 for rural community endowment

grants, demonstrates a commitment to the growth and prosperity of our rural areas. These funds will empower local initiatives, support community-driven projects, and ensure equitable access to resources for all residents.

In conclusion, I urge you to support this transformative legislation, which will benefit our rural communities in North Dakota. Together, we can create a more resilient, vibrant, and sustainable future for all our residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.