

## **Testimony to the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee**

### **On Senate Bill 2097**

**January 17, 2025**

Chair Luick and members of the Committee. I am Murray Sagsveen, and I personally support this bill. I am not representing any church, synod, or commission.

I am the synod attorney for the Western North Dakota Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Each summer, my brother and I visit cemeteries established by former Lutheran churches in western North Dakota to take aerial photos (with my drone) and document the care, condition, and ownership of the cemeteries.

When traveling across western North Dakota, we make every effort to stay in small town motels or B&Bs and to dine in small town restaurants. We are finding that, with every passing year, it is more difficult find a motel, B&B, or restaurant in small towns.

Also, when visiting small towns, we often observe abandoned commercial buildings on main street and abandoned homes in residential areas. Such buildings are an eyesore, are dangerous, and detract from the beauty of an otherwise charming community.

If Senate Bill 2097 is enacted, the State would be able to provide grants to replace abandoned buildings with new businesses or homes and provide open spaces for parks. The grants could also provide start-up money for new community businesses and nonprofits, such as B&Bs, restaurants, affordable housing, and grocery stores.

Accordingly, I urge this committee to vote a “do pass” recommendation on Senate Bill 2097.

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