



Senate Bill 2097 – Support
January 17, 2025
Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs
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Chair Luick and Members of the House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee,

My name is Janelle Moos, Advocacy Director with AARP North Dakota. AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization with nearly 38 million members. 83,000 of those members live in North Dakota.

North Dakota's population is aging. In 2020, 129,836 people in North Dakota were 65 and older, which was a 26% increase from 2010. Connecting with rural audiences is critical to AARP's local community engagement efforts. The dispersed population, vast needs, and operational complexities mean we need to be thoughtful about where and how we show up in communities.

AARP has made significant strides in how we engage rural communities. We have increased our local impact and visibility on access to broadband, disaster preparedness, fraud prevention, and other key issues that matter to rural audiences. Since 2017, roughly 40% of [AARP Community Challenge Grants](#) have been delivered in rural communities, with a total investment of \$7.1 million across 660 grants in rural areas, including 32 grants and \$283,486 throughout North Dakota.

There are a range of issues to work on in rural communities, however there are a few areas that are top priorities outlined in AARP's 2024 Rural Strategy Summary including:

- **Access to Health Care/Healthy Living:** Rural communities and the people who live there have inequities in access to quality health care. Rural communities represent two thirds of the shortage in primary care providers, the average rural person must drive two thirds longer to the hospital than a person in an urban area and rural hospitals are also facing financial crises, stretching this access challenge further. Telehealth can be a critical component to help increase access to providers
- **Broadband/High Speed Internet:** According to the FCC one in four people in rural areas do not have reliable internet access at a high speed. AARP has worked these issues through State and Local advocacy and federal efforts to increase access, improve affordability and more.

- Community Infrastructure (Transportation and Housing): On average a person will outlive their ability to drive by 10 years. This presents unique challenges in rural communities where there is lower service frequency and utilization of public transportation. In addition, rural towns have experienced increased prices in housing and constrained supply, along with aging housing stock.
- Fraud: Fraud is an important topic among our rural members and continues to be one of the top concerns and highest rated issues that our members engage on in rural areas.
- Disaster Preparedness and Response: Rural areas are at a disproportionate risk in experiencing and recovering from extreme weather events. This is due to a prevalence of events as well as a lack of resources and/or capacity to prepare and respond when disasters strike. AARP's work to help communities prepare for and recover from disasters can help us uniquely support rural places and our members who live there.

Connecting and investing in rural communities is critical. The rural endowment fund outlined in SB 2097, supports many of the same priorities AARP has, including improving the health, safety and independence of rural North Dakotans. We think this bill is an important step forward in helping older North Dakotans remain in their communities as they age, therefore, we urge you to support the bill.

Thank you.