

Testimony for HB 1038
Ben Kappel
January 28, 2025

To the Members of the North Dakota State Legislature:

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the allocation of \$15 million for the replacement of just 307 DJI drones under HB 1038. While I appreciate the importance of ensuring our state departments have access to reliable equipment, this allocation raises several questions about fiscal responsibility and efficiency.

Firstly, \$15 million is an extraordinary amount of money for replacing drones, especially given that some of these may include smaller models like DJI Minis, which cost only a few hundred dollars each. By comparison, it seems entirely feasible to replace these drones with top-tier, American-made alternatives while retaining a significant portion of the allocated funds. I estimate that such a replacement effort could leave well over \$10 million unused, indicating that the current budget significantly exceeds the actual need.

Secondly, this legislature is known for championing fiscal responsibility. Allocating such a substantial sum to address a problem for which there is no clear evidence that it actually exists appears inconsistent with that principle. Before committing taxpayer dollars, it is crucial to ensure that these funds are addressing a demonstrated and pressing need rather than a hypothetical one.

Additionally, the proposed funding for drone training is redundant and unnecessary. As a commercial drone operator in the real estate industry, I can attest that transitioning to a new drone brand typically requires only minimal adjustment—a matter of hours, not days or weeks. This training could easily be incorporated into existing departmental training programs without additional cost to the state. Also, from someone who knows drones, you should do some research on the number of industries in ND that do use DJI drones. If this hypothetical problem did exist, every square inch of ND has already been mapped, and a change of a few hundred drones compared to the thousands that fly every day will change nothing.

I understand that departments across the state may be enthusiastic about this funding; however, I urge you to carefully reevaluate the actual costs involved. Taxpayers should not bear the financial burden of replacing potentially inexpensive or outdated drones that may become obsolete within a year or two.

I respectfully propose the following alternatives:

1. Significantly reduce the allocation for this initiative to better reflect the actual costs of replacing the drones.
2. Alternatively, pass a bill mandating that all future drone purchases by state departments be limited to American-made models, without allocating additional funds at this time.

This approach ensures that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and in alignment with the principles of fiscal responsibility that this legislature upholds. I appreciate your consideration of these concerns and trust that you will act in the best interest of North Dakota citizens.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,
Ben Kappel

