

**Testimony of
Lance Gaebe
North Dakota Farmers Union
Regarding SB 2299
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
February 13, 2025**

My name is Lance Gaebe, I represent North Dakota Farmers Union (NDFU). Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns regarding Senate Bill No. 2299.

NDFU strongly supports rural water systems, recognizing their vital role in providing affordable, clean, and safe drinking water. Our members understand a reliable rural water supply is essential for both a thriving agricultural sector and vital rural communities.

NDFU has two primary issues with SB 2299. Section 2 of the bill lowers the barrier for electors to request an audit of rural water districts by requiring only 35% of the qualified electors from the preceding annual meeting. We are concerned by a unique threshold specifically for rural water districts. While we support transparency in local government, frequent audits can be costly and disruptive.

We are also concerned with Section 3 of the bill, which modifies the existing election process for rural water district boards. This provision, which may be intended for a specific situation or board, will impact all water districts statewide. We are not aware of any statewide problem and do not believe state law is the appropriate avenue to address every unique local situation.

Strong rural water systems are crucial for rural communities and the future of North Dakota agriculture. NDFU believes water systems should prioritize delivering quality water, ensuring service reliability, avoiding duplication, and preventing protracted governance conflicts. SB 2299, as written, may detract from this core mission.

NDFU opposes SB 2299. We are willing to work with the relevant stakeholders to advance amendments to address our concerns. Thank you for your consideration.