

Opposing Testimony to House Bill 1255 Submitted to the North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jessica Smette, and I'm a lifelong North Dakotan who has worked in education for a decade. I'm writing to speak out against House Bill 1255, which would take away state funding for public broadcasting in North Dakota. This bill threatens an important resource that has been a part of our communities for years, helping to educate, inform, and connect people across the state. Even more concerning, HB 1255 does not simply remove state funds for Prairie Public for the upcoming biennium—it bans such funding going forward, permanently severing a critical support system for our communities.

Public Broadcasting as an Educational Asset

Prairie Public Broadcasting plays a huge role in providing quality, accessible educational content for North Dakotans of all ages. From early childhood programs that give kids a strong start to documentaries and cultural programming that keep lifelong learners engaged, public broadcasting is a key part of our state's education system. Many rural communities depend on Prairie Public as a primary source of educational content, especially in areas where access to libraries, museums, and other enrichment programs is limited.

A Reliable and Trusted News Source

Public broadcasting makes sure that people in North Dakota have access to fair, in-depth journalism that isn't influenced by advertisers or corporate interests. Prairie Public covers important local and state issues, including government, agriculture, Native American affairs, and rural life—topics that don't always get enough attention in national media. In a time when misinformation spreads so easily, it's more important than ever to support media that focuses on facts and accuracy.

Economic and Cultural Impact

Public broadcasting isn't just a cost—it's a worthy investment in our communities. Prairie Public works with local artists, historians, and educators to create programming that highlights North Dakota's history, culture, and traditions. This kind of content helps strengthen local pride and even boosts cultural tourism, which benefits our economy. Plus, partnerships between Prairie Public, schools, libraries, and civic organizations help create a more informed and engaged society.

Minimal Fiscal Burden, Maximum Public Benefit

Cutting \$1.2 million from the state budget might sound like a responsible move, but the truth is, this small amount of funding goes a long way. The benefits of public broadcasting—education,

reliable news, and community enrichment—far outweigh the cost. Beyond that, state funding helps unlock federal and private contributions, meaning that by cutting this money, we could actually lose more than just the state's contribution.

Conclusion

House Bill 1255 would take away a valuable public service that has been enriching the lives of North Dakotans for generations. I strongly urge the members of this committee to think about the bigger picture and the long-term consequences of cutting off public broadcasting. Supporting Prairie Public means supporting an organization that educates, informs, and connects our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.