



North Dakota Senate

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Senator Josh Boschee

District 44
736 Elm Street North, Apt. 8
Fargo, ND 58102-3859
jboschee@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Education
Workforce Development

SB 2332 Testimony Senate State and Local Government Committee February 7, 2025

Chair Roers and Members of the Senate State and Local Government Committee,

It's good to be with you today to talk about this important piece of legislation that will have a lasting impact on North Dakota's emergency services and public safety. Our first responders—firefighters, paramedics, and law enforcement—are the backbone of our communities. They are the ones who answer the call when disaster strikes, yet many of them are facing increasing challenges. Several of you on this committee have been a part of the conversation, but we know that public safety and emergency services across the board are facing staffing issues and outdated equipment.

As legislators, we continue to hear about the challenges volunteer fire departments are facing as their members age, less community members joining the department and, in many cases, due to depopulation, less people to even staff the department. Those who follow me or have provided written testimony are able to provide you with very specific issues facing the various entities they are familiar with.

An average of two ambulance services closing each biennium over the past 10 years¹ and a recent survey completed by ND ambulance services identifying that as many as 30 may close in the next five years².

Last fall the Northwood police department closed³ requiring the city council to explore partnerships with neighboring towns or the county sheriff's office.

That's why this legislation is so critical. It proposes the creation of the Legacy Earnings Emergency Services and Public Safety Fund, a dedicated funding source designed to strengthen our emergency response systems across the state. Modeled after the Outdoor Heritage Fund, this Fund would provide grants vetted by a Board comprised of statewide associations most directly involved with law enforcement, fire safety, emergency medical service and emergency management in North Dakota. I envision that the Fund would not only allocate money to qualified entities, but it would also bring these stakeholders together to develop proactive, innovative approaches to tackle the issues facing their profession and our communities.

¹ [North Dakota Emergency Medical Services System Presentation](https://ndlegis.gov/sites/default/files/committees/68-2023/25.5035.02000_presentation1020.pdf) (slide 19) - https://ndlegis.gov/sites/default/files/committees/68-2023/25.5035.02000_presentation1020.pdf

² [North Dakota Monitor](https://northdakotamonitor.com/2025/01/08/north-dakota-lawmakers-consider-bill-to-prevent-abrupt-ambulance-service-closures/) (1/8/2025), *North Dakota lawmakers consider bill to prevent abrupt ambulance service closures* - <https://northdakotamonitor.com/2025/01/08/north-dakota-lawmakers-consider-bill-to-prevent-abrupt-ambulance-service-closures/>

³ [InForum](https://www.inforum.com/news/north-dakota/northwood-police-department-signs-off-for-final-time) (9/30/2024), *Northwood Police Department signs off for the final time* - <https://www.inforum.com/news/north-dakota/northwood-police-department-signs-off-for-final-time>

The Legacy Fund was created in 2010 by voters to collect tax revenue from our one-time harvest of oil and gas resources. I believe that every one of us that voted to create the Legacy Fund had ideas of how the money could improve the lives of our neighbors across the state. While prior Assembly's have established priorities for the earnings from the Legacy Fund, we have the opportunity to greatly impact the safety of our communities this session as the amount of those earnings continues to grow, allowing for additional priorities.

SB 2332 proposes transferring \$25 million from the Legacy Fund's earnings into this new public safety fund. This funding is proposed to be housed at the Department of Emergency Services, which will help execute the grants to the various entities the Advisory Board determines to meet the following proposed priorities:

- Recruiting and retaining first responders to combat workforce shortages.
- Expanding emergency services in rural areas, to improve coverage and response times.
- Modernizing public safety technology, ensuring our teams have the best tools available.
- Supporting mental health response teams, recognizing that not all emergencies require a traditional law enforcement response.
- Encouraging collaboration between communities, allowing shared services agreements that maximize efficiency, innovation and regionalization to develop tiered approaches to delivering services.

By ensuring that funds are strategically allocated, this legislation creates a long-term, sustainable approach to funding emergency services rather than relying on band aid fixes.

This bill is not just about numbers on a budget—it's about real people and real lives. When a paramedic arrives at a car accident faster because of better funding, when a rural fire department has the staff to handle an emergency, when a mental health crisis is handled with the right support—that's the impact this legislation will have.

We often say that public safety is a priority, but priorities must be backed by action. This bill is our chance to make a meaningful difference, ensuring that our first responders have the support they need to protect us all and the resources to reach those who need them most.

Let's stand together and make this investment in North Dakota's future.

I hope you'll provide SB 2232 your support and before I stand for any questions, I'd like to suggest Madam Chair that the committee consider amending page 2, line 14 to read "An individual involved with a search and rescue organization." Over the past couple of weeks, I've learned of the importance these organizations have in responding to various emergencies and supporting other areas of public safety.

Thank you. I'm happy to stand for any questions or comments you may have.