

Good morning, Chairman Weisz and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Dave Nelson and I serve as Director of the Life Safety and Construction (LSC) Division of the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH). I am here to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 2241. This bill establishes timelines for the review of health facility construction and renovation projects based on the cost of the project. Because third-party reviewers can be utilized when workload exceeds the capacity of our existing staff, we believe we can achieve the review time frames required in the bill.

Since the beginning of the biennium, sixty-one (61) projects with a budget less than one-million dollars have been submitted and approved for construction by LSC. We have met the required 60 day review time for all submissions. The average time from receipt of a complete application to the first determination letter was twenty-seven (27) working days. Fifteen (15) of these projects exceeded thirty (30) working days. The maximum review period was forty-four (44) working days.

Maintaining full staffing has been challenging. Full staffing was achieved on October 5, 2020 with four (4) full-time equivalent (FTE) plan reviewers.

During the 2019 – 2021 biennium, in effort to provide options for providers, the NDDoH developed the ability for licensed providers to utilize third-party plan reviewers instead of the NDDoH. A list of state-approved contractors has been created and medical facility operators were notified of this service. The current arrangement requires the licensed provider to contract directly with the third-party plan reviewer. That option has been available since August, 2020. To date, no third-party reviewers have been utilized. The provision in this new bill allows LSC the flexibility to continue to engage a third-party reviewer if our work load or the scope of projects being reviewed does not permit us to meet the specified timelines. A continuing appropriation has been added to the legislation to allow for the Department to pass through payment from the health care facility to the third party entity.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.