

Chairman Burckhard and Esteemed Members of the Political Subdivisions Committee,

My name is Shawn Kessel and I have the distinct honor of serving as the interim Commerce Commissioner for North Dakota Department of Commerce. Prior to my current position in the Department of Commerce, I was a City Administrator in two North Dakota communities for over close to 20 years. I am here today to testify in support of SB 2139.

The Commerce department has provided administration and management over the Renaissance Zone since its inception. The Renaissance Zone has been a tremendous program for the state to partner with communities and the private sector to increase property values, preserve historic buildings, create and house new businesses and provide additional housing opportunities in rural and urban settings across North Dakota - adding the Neighborhood Zone can have a similar positive impact.

As I travel across North Dakota and listen to community leaders several themes emerge and one of the most common is concerns over housing. In our smaller communities it is about not having enough housing or the housing that does exist is vintage and not as appealing to buyers and when you construct a new home its value is often times less than the cost of construction so there is no incentive for a builder to construct spec homes. In our urban settings similar concerns about quantity, affordability and the variety of dwelling options are raised as concerns.

This bill, if passed, could assist all North Dakota communities address the very concerns they have raised. It provides another option to elevate the level of existing housing stock and even the construction of new housing stock.

I would like to humbly ask for a “Do Pass” vote on SB2139.

Thank you and I will stand for any questions.

Shawn Kessel
Interim Commerce Commissioner