

January 27, 2023

To: N.D. Senate Appropriations Education and Environment Committee
From: Josh Kramer, executive vice president and general manager, NDAREC
RE: **Support of Senate Bill 2016**

Chairman Sorvaag, members of the Senate Appropriations Education and Environment Committee Division, my name is Josh Kramer, and I'm the executive vice president and general manager of the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC). We represent sixteen electric distribution cooperatives and five generation and transmission cooperatives that generate, transmit and distribute electricity and maintain more than 64,000 miles of powerlines across the state of North Dakota.

North Dakota's electric cooperatives support the establishment of a 24-hour Watch Center, proposed in Senate Bill 2016. As electric cooperatives we are committed to providing affordable, safe and reliable electricity to those we serve. Electric cooperatives continuously work to harden their systems by upgrading electrical infrastructure and deploying tools and technology that help minimize the potential of outages. However, even the sturdiest infrastructure cannot always withstand Mother Nature's wrath nor can a utility prevent all cyber and physical attacks on our nation's electrical infrastructure nationwide. It is time to be even more proactive and improve information sharing and response coordination capability that operates around the clock, as is proposed in this bill.

Electric cooperatives across North Dakota will benefit from a 24/7 state emergency watch center in a variety of ways. First, the proposed watch center will be able to monitor both the surface web and the dark web for cyber and physical threats to key infrastructure, which enables the electric grid to operate with minimal interruption. Further, we will continue to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services (NDDDES). We are in frequent communication and coordination prior to, during and after severe weather events impact on our member's electrical systems. This relationship is essential for public safety and prompt power restoration in impacted service areas. NDAREC benefits by having a single point of coordination for

requesting state resources, when necessary, and by having a centralized information point for sharing key outage and restoration information. The state benefits by having a centralized contact for technical electric grid information, restoration projections and forecasting of likely impacts to electric service across the state.

To further bolster our collaboration, NDAREC is investing in technology to create a real-time statewide outage map and is willing to provide the information directly to NDDDES. While this collaboration and information sharing will be greatly beneficial, it will be more impactful if the central point of coordination is proactively monitoring and coordinating actions, as is proposed in the concept of a Watch Center.

Threats against our grid, whether man-made or natural, are continuous and do not stop at 5 p.m. Electric cooperatives, other utilities, and state and local governments cooperate and depend on one another to maintain safety and serve our citizens. One example of this coordination is the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) providing a snowplow to reach a downed line. This allowed the electric cooperative to safely secure an area and begin restoration. Another example is coordination with the North Dakota Highway Patrol (NDHP) to provide access to a closed road for the same reason. While this coordination takes place currently, it could be more efficiently accomplished with one identified coordination point ready at all times. Other incidents where a watch center would be mutually beneficial include wildfires or floods. Early warning would provide opportunities to mitigate damage to electrical infrastructure and improve coordination, which would result in quicker restoration.

Cooperatives across the state have varying abilities to proactively monitor for threats, whether they're online or from bad actors. A 24/7 capability that uses state-of-the-art technology to identify, assess and alert on threats would bolster grid security across the region.

In conclusion, North Dakota's electric cooperatives strongly endorse the establishment of a 24/7 state watch center. Such a center would greatly enhance our ability share information and respond quickly and effectively to power outages and other emergency situations relating to our power grid. This will not only help protect the safety and well-being of our members, but also help minimize the disruption and inconvenience caused by power outages. I thank you for your support and the opportunity to testify before the committee today. I am happy to answer any questions.