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Testimony of Amie Vasichек in support of HB 1018 – with an amendment

To Senate Appropriations Committee – Government Operations Division
March 8, 2023

Chairman Wanzek and members of the Committee:

I am Amie Vasichек, City Auditor for the City of Lakota and Board Member for the Nelson County JDA.

I'm seeking your consideration of an amendment to support \$8 million (\$1 million per biennia per region) funding for the eight regional councils which serve communities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and more statewide.

Created by NDCC 54-40.1 in 1973, the regional councils were to serve the purpose of establishing statewide policy for planning, economic development programs, operation, coordination and related cooperative activities of state/local governments to resolve issues and problems transcending individual jurisdictions. Yet, these organizations have not had a consistent long-term funding mechanism to meet this purpose.

Today, our region can have a rural renaissance with the need for more than 1,500 new employees in our small towns – but only if we address the critical needs of **housing, workforce, and childcare**. In 2021/2022, we enlisted Roger Brooks, a renowned national expert on **destination development** to secret shop our region and develop an action plan that would support visitor, resident, and investment attraction to northeastern North Dakota. The plan is ready to go – it calls for six professional staff to lead – which is currently not available due to the lack of funding.

The current team at the Red River Regional council has identified and onboarded new, highly skilled staff around workforce, housing and the Destination Red River Action Plan provided by Roger Brooks – this funding would provide the stability and long-term funding solution to allow them to focus on these key issues hampering today's growth potential. **WE NEED THIS!**

I urge your support for increasing the rural development capacity across the state by supporting this amendment for \$8 million for the eight regional councils.