

**HB 1157 Fisher House**

**Representative Michelle Strinden**

**Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup> 2023**

**Good morning Chair Luick and Senate Agriculture and Veteran Affairs Committee,**

**My name is Michelle Strinden, and I represent the people of South Fargo's District 41. I have the pleasure to present to you HB 1157 on behalf of all North Dakota veterans and their families.**

**House Bill 1157 would provide a 500,000 dollar general fund appropriation to the construction of the Fisher House. It was given a unanimous DP recommendation by your House Appropriations committee with a vote of 22-0 and also resoundingly passed the House Chamber.**

**The Fisher House is like a Ronald McDonald House for families of veterans who are undergoing serious medical treatment at the VA Hospital in Fargo. The first Fisher House was built 30 years ago when John and Elizabeth Fisher were at Walter Reed Hospital and noticed members of veterans sleeping on couches and in their cars and trucks. This was unacceptable for the Fisher family. Since that time, more than 80 Fisher Houses have been built in the U.S. and military posts around the world. But not in North Dakota. The need is great.**

**The Fargo VA hospital has the biggest footprint in the nation and serves veterans in all of ND, 18 counties in Western Minnesota and one county in South Dakota. Many veterans travel up to 300 miles away to receive care in Fargo, but where do their families stay**

during medical emergencies? The cost of a hotel during a 7 to 10 day stay is very expensive.

More than 7 million dollars in private donations has already been raised for construction of the project. Last special session, our legislature approved \$500,000 of federal ARPA dollars for construction costs and with your approval, the state of ND will match that federal contribution. This is a one time expenditure and ownership and all ongoing maintenance and expenses will be covered by the federal government after its completion. Groundbreaking is expected near the VA campus in the spring of 2024.

We love our veterans and also the families of veterans who have made great sacrifices and are rarely acknowledged for it. The families will be able to stay at a home away from home during their loved ones medical crisis.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 1157 Chair Luick and Committee members.