

Chairman Patten, Vice Chair Magrum and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee,

My name is Cory Meyer and I am the Assistant Chief of the Devils Lake Fire Department and one of four co-chairs of the Devils Lake Volunteer Fire Department Ice Fishing Tournament.

I am here today to encourage you to vote yes on HB 1538 in its current version.

The 39th Annual Devils Lake Volunteer Fire Department Ice Fishing Tournament and Raffle is held the last Saturday of January each year. It is the largest ice fishing tournament in North Dakota and is the largest Tourney/Raffle of its kind in the region. While there are larger ice fishing events where you must fish to win prizes, this is the largest ticket selling event.

The tournament and raffle is a profitable fundraiser for our department, our community, and other local, small town organizations, offering an economic impact of nearly \$2 million a year. Each year we donate just over \$10,000 to small organizations, contribute to local conservation through this fee, and spend over \$325,000 on prizes, much of that going to local businesses. While the benefits outweigh the costs, we have seen our bottom line gradually shrinking away. Expenses to run the tournament and the cost of prizes have greatly increased over the last few years, and the change in how the conservation fee is figured has also taken its toll.

Some may ask the question, "Why don't you raise the price of the fishing ticket or offer more tickets?" Currently the Tickets sell for \$25 and the breakdown of the ticket is \$21 for the raffle side and \$4 is the fishing part of the ticket. Since most of the fees are based on percentages, a moderate increase will have minimal impact on our bottom line. We also have to take into consideration those that buy the tickets. Will supporters be willing to pay more for the same ticket? Will we be able to sell more tickets?

Since 2013, including the 2023 Tourney, the Ice Fishing Tourney has paid \$85,096 in Conservation Fees to the ND Game and Fish. While we understand and appreciate what the fees are used for, each dollar paid for conservation is a dollar we are unable to use towards purchasing and maintaining life saving equipment within our department. To put things in perspective, the cost to outfit a firefighter in turnout gear, boots, helmet, hood, gloves, and with a breathing apparatus is roughly \$10,000. That doesn't include all the tools and equipment attached to our trucks. These items all come at an expense and are necessary in meeting the goal of our department, ensuring the safety of our community and as well as our department members.

As stated previously, we are very interested in contributing to groups within our community. The elimination of the conservation fee will give us local control in where our money goes. We would like to see more money go to the groups that help us make the tournament happen. The rules set by the Game and Fish leave very little options to donate money to the local girl scouts who help us with parking during the tournament, or some of our local public school booster clubs whose kids and parents come out to help us drill holes or set up the concessions on the lake. Yes, the organizations we recommend each year to receive the conservation money are worthy causes, but they also have little to do with this community based event. Wouldn't it be great if we could get them to come out each year and have them earn a bit of the money we give them? We are always short of help and maybe incentivising the effort will lead to more people willing to help.

I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to speak with you today and encourage you to vote YES on HB 1538. It could make all the difference to our tournament, fire department, and community!