

1/23/2025

Statement in Support of HB 1396 Amendments to Section 61-16.1-45

By Levi Otis, Director of Government Affairs, Ellingson Companies

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Levi Otis, and I serve as the Director of Government Affairs for Ellingson Companies. We specialize in agricultural water management, working with thousands of farmers across North Dakota to ensure sustainable practices that benefit our communities and economy.

I am here to express strong support for the proposed amendments to HB 1396, which reinforce the importance of legal drainage systems, foster collaboration among landowners, and ensure the economic and community benefits of improved drainage projects.

The Role of Legal Drains in Agriculture and the Economy

Legal drainage systems are the backbone of North Dakota agriculture, enabling farmers to manage water effectively to improve soil health, reduce erosion, prevent flooding, and enhance overall crop yields. These systems are not just critical for individual farmers but also drive economic growth by supporting the state's agricultural productivity, which is vital to our local and national food supply. When farmers work together to establish and maintain legal drains, the collective benefits extend far beyond individual properties. Communities see improved infrastructure, reduced disaster recovery costs, and increased economic stability. However, achieving and sustaining these benefits requires commitment and financial responsibility from all stakeholders.

Discouraging Barriers to Progress

The amendments to HB 1396 take a crucial step in discouraging behaviors that hinder progress and create undue burdens on other taxpayers. When individuals fail to pay their fair share of assessments or actively oppose necessary projects, it slows down improvements that benefit the broader community and state. By limiting voting eligibility for those who have not paid their assessments and restricting drainage approvals for those who vote against progress, the bill ensures fairness and accountability in decision-making.

Encouraging Collaboration and Accountability

Drainage projects succeed when landowners come together with a shared vision for improvement and sustainability. The amendments incentivize participation and

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discourage behaviors that shift financial burdens onto others. By requiring those who benefit from these projects to contribute fairly, the bill fosters a culture of accountability and ensures that the cost of maintaining and improving drainage infrastructure is shared equitably.

Securing Long-Term Benefits for North Dakota

Improved drainage systems benefit not just farmers but entire communities. They protect homes, infrastructure, and local economies from the devastating effects of flooding and poor water management. These amendments ensure that the projects needed to sustain this vital infrastructure can move forward without unnecessary delays caused by individuals who do not contribute their share.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to provide a "DO PASS" recommendation for HB 1396. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

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