

North Dakota

Travel Alliance Partnership

March 17, 2025

Chairman Nathe and members of the House Appropriations Education and Environment Division:

My name is Scooter Pursley and I am the executive director of the North Dakota Travel Alliance Partnership (TAP). TAP is a coalition of travel industry stakeholders, including convention and visitors bureaus, state attractions, businesses and others who help make tourism the third-largest industry in North Dakota.

I write today to ask for your help with Senate Bill 2018, the North Dakota Commerce Department appropriations bill. As you know, Tourism Division funding is included in SB 2018.

Last session, your committee graciously allocated \$25 million for tourism Destination Development Grants. The program proved successful, with many more requests received than there was funding available. This session, SB 2018 comes to you with a reduction of funding to \$20 million. TAP respectfully asks you consider amending the bill to at least match last session's \$25 million. We know the need is out there and the more funding that is made available, the more we can develop travel and tourism projects to draw visitors the state.

In addition, TAP asks that you consider amending the bill to increase the \$7 million appropriated for marketing to \$10 million. With the opening in 2026 of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, all eyes will be on North Dakota as news spreads through this biennium. This increase would allow the Tourism Division to reach markets it is currently is priced out of, thus increasing visitation throughout North Dakota.

Finally, TAP asks you to consider making the appropriation for marketing ongoing funding within the Commerce Department's base budget rather than one-time funding under separate consideration each session.

A Tourism Economics study in 2023 found 25.6 million visitors spent \$3.3 billion in North Dakota. That helped support 40,000 jobs and generate \$307 million in state and local tax revenue. That number could be expected to rise significantly in the coming years. We have been presented with an opportunity that we can't let pass. We ask that you give the Tourism Division the resources more closely aligned with those in neighboring states and to watch what it can do.

As you are aware, SB 2154 recently passed through both chambers unanimously and awaits only the governor's signature making it a "primary sector" business, like

energy, manufacturing and technology. As such, it should receive the same consideration as other primary sector businesses with adequate funding that will lead to the creation of new wealth through visitation, relocation and workforce development.

TAP respectfully asks for your support for these amendments to SB 2018 to better fund this new primary sector business.

Thank you for your consideration and I am available to answer any questions you may have.

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