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March 20th, 2025

Chairman Monson and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

Re: SB 2014

My name is Amie Vasichok, and I have had the privilege of serving as the City Auditor of Lakota for over 16 years and as the Chair of the Nelson County JDA. Additionally, I have been a proud board member of the Red River CHDO for the past two years. Today, I am here to express my strong support for Senate Bill 2014.

As you know, housing is the cornerstone of prosperous communities. However, in rural areas like Lakota, the lack of available housing remains one of the greatest obstacles to growth and sustainability.

Lakota, a community of roughly 700 residents, has long struggled to find successful ways to expand our population and business base. When Lisa Rotvold introduced the idea of utilizing Housing Incentive Funds (HIF) to construct single-family homes in select towns, I knew this was an opportunity Lakota needed to pursue. I promptly presented the idea to our city council, requesting permission to donate city-owned lots and position Lakota as a potential Spark Build community.

Our city council has been receptive to new ideas, and this project was no exception. I was tasked with identifying vacant city-owned lots that could be offered for development. These lots had either remained empty for years or had been deeded back to the city. Although there had been previous interest in these lots, the significant cost of building and the challenge of securing contractors had consistently deterred potential buyers.

Once Lakota was selected as a Spark Build community, we actively promoted the opportunity to potential homeowners. While the city had no role in selecting floor

plans, finishes, or buyers, we eagerly spread the word through social media, newsletters, flyers, and conversations with residents. Initially, there was some confusion about the program—some believed the homes were intended for low-income housing or assumed they were unaffordable. It took time, outreach, and one-on-one discussions to clarify the project's true intent and highlight the opportunity it presented.

Lakota is proud to have been the first community to build "Spark Homes" using HIF. The result was two beautiful homes sold at \$325,000 each on land that had previously sat vacant for years, increasing our city's property valuation. This project also triggered a positive ripple effect:

- One Spark Home buyer sold their existing home to a young couple who had recently returned to Lakota and were living in an apartment unit.
- Freed up apartment unit for a new resident joining our community.

This chain reaction underscores the meaningful impact that HIF can have on small-town growth and revitalization.

I am frequently asked by residents, "Are we building more homes this year?" I truly hope we are. There is still demand for additional housing in Lakota and across North Dakota.

This project would not have been possible without the dedication of the Red River CHDO and the leadership of Lisa Rotvold, who played a vital role in bringing these homes to fruition.

I am so very proud to speak on the success of this project and over the course of 16 years working for the city of Lakota, it has been one of my favorite projects to be part of. Thank you for the opportunity to share Lakota's experience and demonstrate how HIF has positively impacted our community. I respectfully ask for your support of SB 2014.

Sincerely,
Amie Vasichuk
City Auditor, Lakota, ND
Chair, Nelson County JDA