



ASSOCIATION
OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

Testimony of Dawn Mandt

Support of SB 2097 – With Amendments

To the House Political Subdivisions Committee

Friday, March 7, 2025

Good morning Rep. Longmuir and members of the Committee. My name is Dawn Mandt, and I live in Grafton. I'm the executive director of the Red River Regional Council and have been working in rural development in North Dakota since 1992. I also serve as chair of the ND Association of Regional Councils, which has helped communities across the state for 50 years.

In the mid-1070s, the legislature called for the establishment of eight regional councils to provide a cohesive planning and development approach statewide and tackle challenges that extend beyond individual communities. Regional councils are experts in securing funding and supporting local and regional projects and are the backbone of rural development.

In the past five years, we have ...

- Helped communities, businesses, and volunteers with 1,410 funding requests that secured nearly **\$365 million** for projects.
 - These projects include childcare centers, new housing and fixing older homes, business expansion, grocery stores, infrastructure improvements, and launched regional rural workforce and tourism initiatives.
 - Our work has impacted **every county** in North Dakota, especially in small towns with half of the cities under 1,000 as beneficiaries of our recent efforts.
- Convened nearly 6,000 people at 411 public forums and planning sessions – discussing the future of our regions.
- Created 55 development plans.
- Our impact report is attached to this testimony for your reference.

We have our fingers on the pulse of rural North Dakota.

We see firsthand the unmet needs of rural communities, especially when funding doesn't align with local projects. To help, we proposed **SB 2390 – the Rural Catalyst Challenge Grant Program**, which would match **\$2 in state funds for every \$1 in local funds** to improve quality of life in communities under 8,500 people. The Senate reduced our original request of **\$30 million to \$5 million** but supported the program's structure. This bill is before your committee next week.

We also support creating a **rural community endowment fund** that can grow over time.

For **SB 2097**, we suggest the following amendments:

1. Raising the eligible population limit from **1,000 to 5,000 or 8,500** to avoid leaving out 41 mid-sized rural communities such as Stanley, Casselton, Rolla, Washburn, Mayville, New Rockford, and Park River.
 - i) The 1,000-person threshold creates **“missing middle”** with slightly larger populations and very similar needs and abilities without access to this pool.
 - ii) These 1,000+ person cities are often home to many of the healthcare, grocery, childcare, and other basic services the smaller towns rely upon.
 - iii) Half of the 307 cities under 1,000 are less than 100 people.
2. Removing Sections 4, 5, and 6, as grantmaking which was removed from SB 2097 by the Senate with favor for **SB 2390** for this purpose.

SB 2390 is a pilot program to show the **impact of flexible rural funding in address current and future needs**. We ask for your support in making it a reality.

Thank you!

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Sparking development, strengthening community.

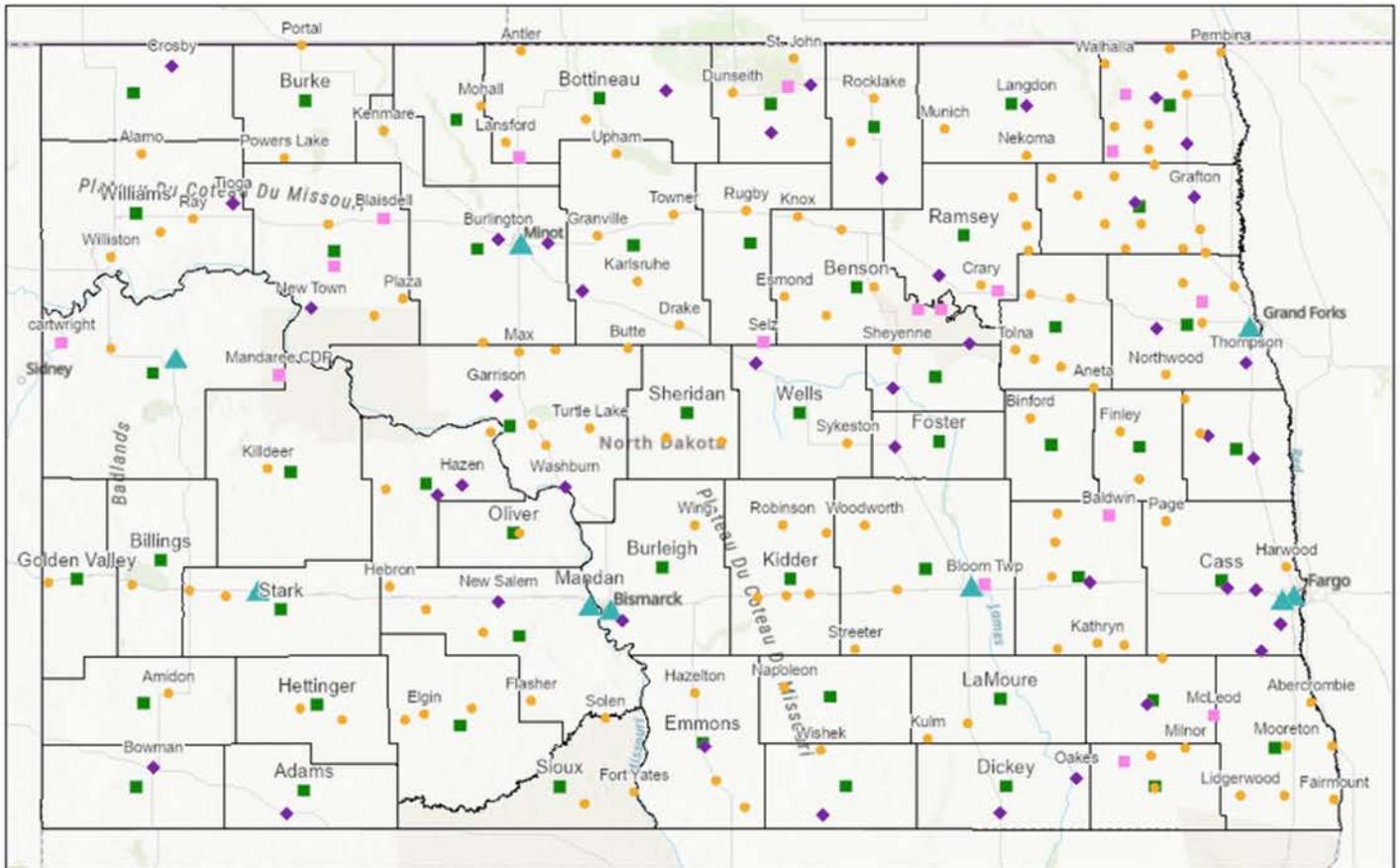
REGIONAL COUNCILS ARE A CORNERSTONE OF THE STATE'S ECONOMIC RENAISSANCE AND COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION. HERE'S A GLIMPSE INTO THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT



- Cultivating the economy
- Implementing workforce attraction & retention systems
- Enhancing quality of life through enhanced community experiences
- Providing predictive expertise, skilled project planning, and funding solutions

REGIONAL COUNCILS' NETWORK OF DEVELOPMENT EXPERTS DRIVE IMPACTFUL RESULTS ACROSS EVERY COUNTY (SEE PAGE 2 FOR DATA)

ND Association of Regional Councils Impacts 2019-2023



2/3/2025

- Unincorporated Places
- Cities under 1,000 pop.
- ◆ Cities 1,000 to 8,500
- ▲ Cities 8,500 to 150,000
- Counties engaged with Regional Councils



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North Dakota Association of Regional Councils Statewide Impact | 2019-2023

Effectiveness of the Regional Councils and contractual partner organizations



FUNDING APPLICATIONS ASSISTED **1,410**

TOTAL FUNDING SECURED WITH REGIONAL COUNCIL ASSISTANCE **\$364,751,823**

ADDITIONAL FUNDS LEVERAGED **\$531,557,176**

TOTAL INVESTMENT IN NORTH DAKOTA \$896,308,998

JOBS CREATED OR RETAINED **5,122**

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS CREATED **55**

PUBLIC FORUMS, MEETINGS & PLANNING SESSIONS **411**

TOTAL ATTENDEES ENGAGED **5,900**

LOCAL LEADER BOARD MEMBERS **202**

Long-term Stability and Accountability

Permanent funding for Regional Councils is essential for several reasons:

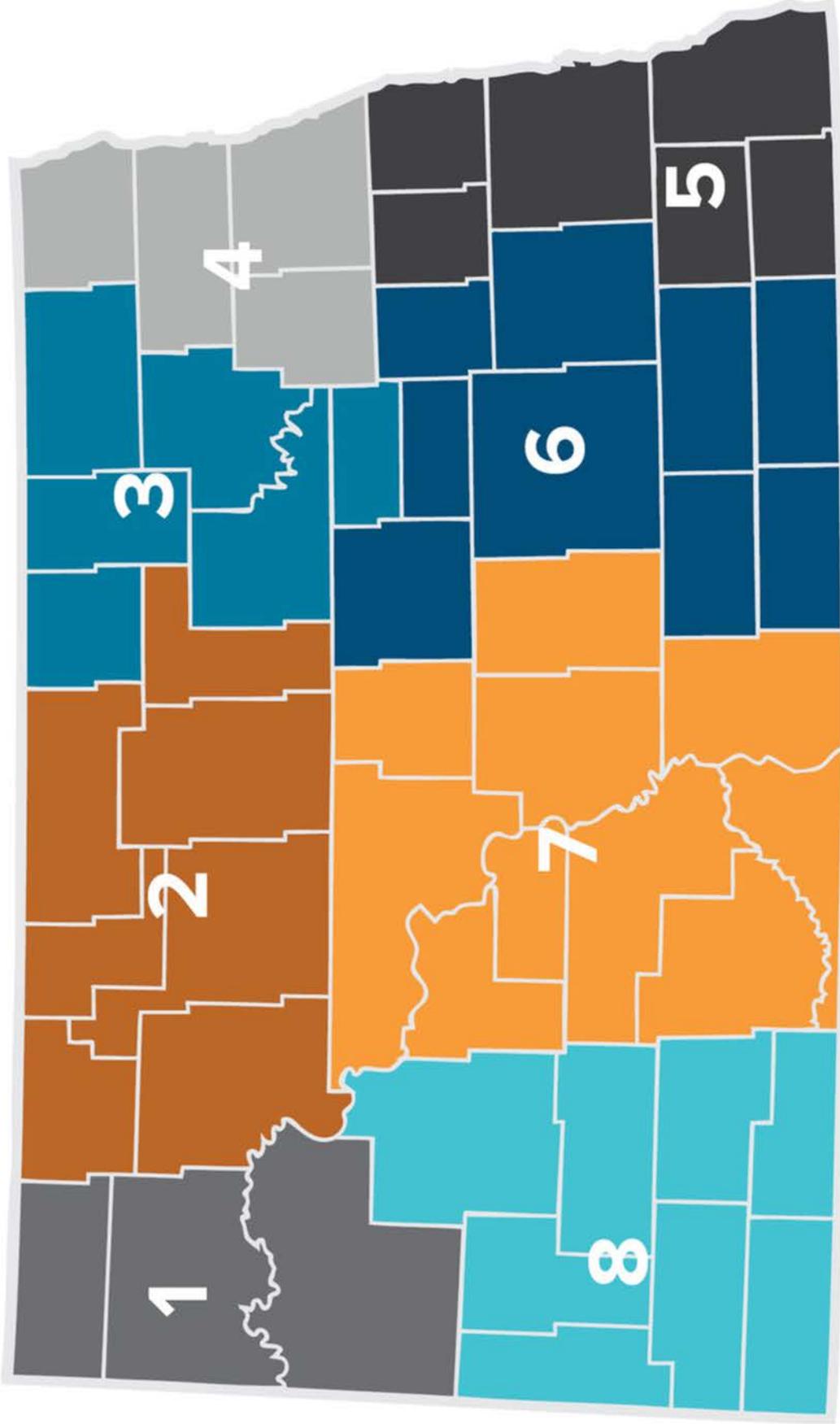
- Ensures **long-term stability** beyond a single biennium
- Local funds create **high levels of accountability**
- Regional Councils serve as **exemplary models for public-private partnerships**

REGIONAL COUNCILS REVOLUTIONIZING RURAL COMMUNITIES

SMART DEVELOPMENT | FUTURE-READY INFRASTRUCTURE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE & GROWTH

- Business development
- Zoning and land use planning
- Grant writing and technical assistance
- Housing development
- Child care support
- Workforce development
- Infrastructure planning
- Tourism and placemaking initiatives
- Disaster recovery planning
- Community leadership development

By permanently funding Regional Councils, North Dakota can maintain its commitment to fostering economic growth and community vitality across the state, particularly in rural areas that may otherwise struggle to access necessary resources and expertise.



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