

Testimony of Josh Buchmann
Roosevelt Custer Regional Council and Bowman County
In Favor of HB 1524
January 30, 2025

Chairman Wanzek and Committee Members:

My name is Josh Buchmann, and I am the President of Roosevelt Custer Regional Council (RCRC) and a Commissioner for Bowman County. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 1524 and respectfully ask the committee to consider increasing the appropriation for regional councils to \$5.75 million.

Roosevelt Custer Regional Council proudly serves 8 counties in Southwest North Dakota. Of the communities we serve, all but three have populations under 1,000 residents. These communities rely heavily on the support and technical assistance we provide to move projects forward and access state and federal funding opportunities.

I've served on the RCRC board since 2018, and during this time, I've witnessed the profound impact an active regional council can have on rural communities. When I first joined the board, RCRC was struggling to stay active, and our region lacked the resources to support the needs of Southwest North Dakota. At that time, we didn't even have a physical office to serve Region 8.

In 2022, we made the decision to relocate RCRC to Bowman, ND, and began the process of rebuilding. We hired staff and secured contract management to help us become an active regional council again—one that could provide critical support for businesses and tourism in our area.

Today, RCRC is once again assisting our rural communities. Through our efforts, we've secured gap financing, implemented Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to benefit rural communities, and launched a regional talent attraction campaign. We've been able to assist small communities in securing funding for vital projects, such as new clinics, fire halls, updated water mains, and more. This kind of support is essential to the sustainability of our smallest communities.

With a current team of just two full-time staff members and three part-time contract staff, we are doing great work, but the demand for services continues to grow. Increasing funding to \$5.75 million would allow RCRC to hire three additional full-time employees, which we believe would make a significant difference in our ability to serve the entire region more effectively and proactively.

To effectively address the challenges of rural development, housing, infrastructure, workforce growth, and essential services, we need sustained, dedicated funding. HB 1524

would provide this, enabling us to expand our efforts and better support the diverse needs of our region.

As President of RCRC, I've seen firsthand the dedication of our staff in securing grants and managing projects. These grants have been essential in rebuilding our organization and fostering economic growth in our region. However, securing grants can be a long and complicated process, and they often don't provide the stability or long-term funding needed to ensure ongoing support for rural businesses and tourism. HB 1524 addresses this challenge by providing stable funding, ensuring that regional councils can continue their critical work and help rural communities access state and federal resources.

HB 1524 also aligns with broader efforts to improve rural economic development, infrastructure, housing, workforce growth, and essential services. It provides technical expertise to help rural communities navigate complex funding applications, project development, and reporting. It also offers project managers who will be dedicated to advancing rural development initiatives, something that will level the playing field for smaller communities.

On behalf of Roosevelt Custer Regional Council, the counties and communities of Region 8, and Bowman County, I urge you to support HB 1524 and consider increasing the funding to \$5.75 million. Regional councils are vital to the sustainability and prosperity of rural communities across our state, and this bill will ensure they have the resources needed to thrive.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Josh Buchmann
President, Roosevelt Custer Regional Council
Commissioner, Bowman County