

Chairman and Vice Chair, and honorable committee, my name is Aaron Barth, and I oversee the Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation and the Northern Plains Heritage Foundation, cultural heritage nonprofits that regularly partner and work with the North Dakota Department of Commerce and Tourism Division. People visit places because they are curious about them, and they are curious about the lived history that is the heritage of those places. All of this allows us to inform residents and visitors of how and why we arrived to our present. This, in turn, provides all of us with a footing of where we want to launch tomorrow.

Through these partnerships we develop historic senses of place in the urban and the rural. This in turn allows us to bring history beyond the textbook and show residents and visitors the heritage and history within the landscape.

Three recent examples are as follows. In July 2024, our cultural nonprofits hosted National Park Service visitors from across the nation in Bismarck and took them upriver to the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Washburn and Knife River Indian Village National Historic Site in Stanton. We brought along tribal historians (from Standing Rock and the MHA Nation) who provided oral histories of this area, past and present. To this day, the visitors still text and e-mail me about the intellectual and cultural wonders of that visit. "I didn't realize you had so much here!" is the often-repeated phrase we hear.

Another example is our artist trained cohort for cultural heritage public murals: from 2016 to 2023, we developed a community public mural install on the Interstate-94 Grant Marsh bridge pier that spans the Missouri River in Bismarck. Every component of this mural was informed by heritage and naturalist history. The mural completion, in turn, gave rise in the summer of 2024 to using the same process for developing the community cultural heritage mural on the north elevation of the historic Carnegie Library in Grafton, ND. We were able to assist local Grafton community members on that. This process, as of yesterday, has garnered the interest of the communities of Maddock and Gwinner, North Dakota. These community murals are expressions of love of place and communicate to visitors why all our places matter.

A third example is the North Dakota Destination Development (NDDD) grant awarded to the Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation to create a publicly spirited cultural heritage park immediate to the Missouri River in North Dakota's capital city of Bismarck. We were able to leverage this \$4,000,000 NDDD grant award into, at present, an additional \$4.3 million in non-state awards. This project will be completed in summer 2026, an appropriate time and space to host one of the many America 250 (1776-2026) celebrations, among others.

To get to the point: it is important to our nonprofits that the legislature funds ND Commerce and Tourism at the requested amounts. Thank you so very much for reading my submitted testimony to the end.

Sincerely,



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