

**Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee**

**HB 1541**

**March 20, 2025**

Chairperson Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Committee:

I am Erin Ourada, the administrator of Western Plains Public Health, a five-county public health unit based in Mandan. We oversee the installation of onsite septic systems in Grant, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, and Sioux Counties, as well as extended responsibilities in Emmons and Kidder Counties.

We know that improper installation of septic systems poses a significant health threat to all citizens of North Dakota and its natural water resources. We also know that over the years, a patchwork of regulations has resulted in varying standards, leading to frustration among installers, landowners, and regulators.

That is why I support legislation that moves oversight for septic systems to the Department of Environmental Quality. DEQ has subject matter experts on staff that can create a statewide code that can be implemented at the local level. There is also a need for statewide licensure of septic system installers. Permitting and inspections of septic systems should remain at the local level. Local public health units (and some city/county planning and zoning boards) have the capacity at the local level to permit and inspect every septic system installed in our local communities. A statewide agency may not have a similar capacity across the state.

As it stands today, HB 1541 effectively addresses these issues, and I fully support it. Likewise, SB 2267 aligns with these priorities, making it another viable solution. As long as the result of this process leads to those outcomes listed above, then we as a state will be able to ensure our environment, communities, and water systems stay safe.

This approach ensures local input is preserved, public health is protected, and our environment is safeguarded. I appreciate the efforts of those who have worked diligently on this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,  
Erin Ourada, MPH, REHS/RS  
403 Burlington St SE  
Mandan, ND 58554  
701-667-3370