

Testimony  
Senate Bill No. 2033  
Senate Human Services Committee  
Senator Lee, Chair  
January 8, 2025

Chairperson Lee, and members of the Senate Committee, I am Chris Price with the Department of Health and Human Services (Department). I appear before you in support of Senate Bill No. 2033 which seeks to address the pressing issue of distressed ambulance services within our state.

Emergency medical services (EMS) are a cornerstone of public health and safety, providing timely and life-saving care to individuals in need. Yet, rural and underserved communities in North Dakota face unique challenges in maintaining reliable ambulance services. Staffing shortages, financial constraints, and operational difficulties have the potential to place many EMS agencies at risk of failure, creating gaps in service and jeopardizing the health and safety of our residents.

Senate Bill 2033 represents a proactive, structured, and transparent solution to this critical issue by establishing the Distressed Ambulance Service Program. This program is designed to identify struggling ambulance services, assist them with corrective action, and ensure sustainable EMS delivery. I would like to highlight several key components of the bill that underscore its importance:

### 1. Identification and Accountability

The bill mandates the Department of Health and Human Services to identify EMS providers who fail to comply with federal or state regulations, indicate an intention to cease operations, or face significant service delivery challenges. This ensures that potential service disruptions are detected early, allowing timely intervention.

### 2. Collaborative Planning

Once an ambulance service is declared distressed, the program ensures the development of an Emergency Medical Services Plan.

This plan involves input from a diverse group of stakeholders, including local governments, medical facilities, adjacent EMS providers, and community members. This collaborative approach fosters local solutions tailored to the specific needs of the affected service area.

### 3. Transparency and Public Engagement

Public meetings are required at multiple stages of plan development to ensure community input and buy-in.

Transparency is critical to building trust among residents and stakeholders, particularly in rural areas where ambulance services are integral to public safety.

### 4. Financial and Administrative Support

The creation of the Distressed Ambulance Service Program Fund provides a dedicated funding source to support the program and cover many associated costs. However, it is important to acknowledge that there will be additional administrative expenses to implement and manage the program that may not be fully covered by the fund. While the fund significantly reduces financial

barriers, supplemental resources will be necessary to ensure the program's comprehensive and effective administration.

## 5. Protecting Public Health and Safety

The bill empowers the department to take necessary actions to safeguard public health if a distressed ambulance service fails to comply with an approved plan. This authority ensures continuity of service and mitigates risks to public safety.

## 6. Ongoing Monitoring and Reporting

Regular evaluations of plans and program outcomes, as well as interim reports to legislative management, ensure accountability and continuous improvement of the program.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 2033 equips the state with the tools necessary to support and sustain reliable ambulance services, particularly in rural and underserved areas. It demonstrates North Dakota's commitment to ensuring that no community is left without access to critical emergency care. By addressing the root

causes of service instability, this bill strengthens the EMS system and safeguards the well-being of our residents.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to try to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.