

Testimony of Melissa Beach in Support of HB 1524
Senate Industry & Business | March 17, 2025

Chairman Barta and members of the Senate Industry & Business Committee,

My name is Melissa Beach, and I am the Economic Development Administrator at Minnkota Power Cooperative. I am here today to express my strong support for House Bill 1524, which would provide base funding to the eight regional councils across North Dakota. I believe that this bill is vital for continuing and expanding the success of community and economic development in our state.

For nearly 15 years, I've worked in economic development in eastern North Dakota. In that time, I've watched small businesses and communities struggle. With high turnover in city staff, economic developers and the volunteers that often fill the roles of planners, recruiters, grant writers and more in our communities, we're being left behind other states that have carefully developed levels of support for communities. Throughout these 15 years, regional councils have often been one of the first places I direct businesses or communities. These organizations are on the ground, funded with local dollars and have great ties to their communities – but it's not enough.

In my experience in eastern North Dakota, regional councils have been instrumental in implementing a variety of important projects. For instance, Lake Agassiz Regional Council, which serves the southeastern part of the state, has recently spearheaded initiatives to support workforce development programs, secure and administer federal programs for both businesses and communities and much more. Additionally, the Red River Regional Council has been heavily involved in revitalizing historic buildings, developing regional tourism, retaining businesses and spearheading community development efforts like housing and childcare. For years, these organizations have continued to boost local economies and create new opportunities for residents in the area.

These examples highlight the tremendous impact these regional councils have on local economies and communities in North Dakota. All while being a state mandated entity with no funding.

I urge the committee to support this bill, and its initial funding level, to provide the necessary base funding to the regional councils. By doing so, we are investing in a more prosperous future for North Dakota.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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