



2025 SB 2097
Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee
Senator Larry Luick, Chairman
January 17, 2025

Chairman Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee, I am Melissa Hauer, General Counsel/VP of the North Dakota Hospital Association (NDHA). I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 2097. I ask that you give this bill a **Do Pass** recommendation.

Hospitals support the creation of a rural community endowment fund for rural communities in our state to support, create, or improve local housing, workforce, business recruitment and commerce, infrastructure, or other community needs. We especially appreciate that, when awarding grants from the fund, the bill would require prioritization of projects that support the long-term prosperity, independence, safety, health, and quality of life of rural communities and their citizens.

In rural communities, hospitals are especially important to the long-term health and economic viability of a community. Hospitals provide crucial access to healthcare services like emergency and primary care and also are often the primary employer and economic driver for the area, generating jobs and supporting local businesses by providing essential medical services that might not be available otherwise. This presence includes benefits like improved access to healthcare, economic stability, and community health initiatives addressing social determinants of health like housing and nutrition.

The bill provides that grant funds are available for rural communities with a population of fewer than one thousand individuals and there are a number of hospitals located in cities of that size. We envision that the grant funds could be used creatively by these communities to drive positive change in areas such as workforce development, affordable housing, and increasing childcare options – all of which are critical to hospitals and other businesses being able to operate and provide services. Investing in such critical infrastructure could also stimulate economic development through the indirect effects of

such investment and resulting growth in rural communities. An endowment fund such as the one in the bill would ensure that funds are available for rural community development long into the future. We see this fund as being able to support creative, locally developed, tailored investment in the health of entire rural communities.

In summary, we thank you for your support of the rural areas of our state and ask that you support passage of this bill.

I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Hauer, General Counsel/VP
North Dakota Hospital Association