

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB2271

“Housing Incentive Fund”

January 30, 2019

Chairman Holmberg and Committee Members. My name is Dan Hannaher, and I am the Director of Community Engagement for Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota. I am here on behalf of Lutheran Social Services Housing to support SB2271.

Housing is about more than a place to live. We at Lutheran Social Services know that first hand, and perhaps with a somewhat unique perspective. We are a provider of both housing and supportive services to families, seniors, in communities all across the state. In almost every hearing we have provided testimony for, we have been able to authentically reference housing and the role it played or can play in that person's road to achieving wellbeing.

In past years we have put Housing Incentive Fund dollars to work in Watford City, Belfield, Bowman, Hettinger, Beulah and Williston. The availability of this flexible yet targeted state housing development resource was the difference between these projects being built and not. We were able to create mixed income rental housing properties that served community needs, blending lower rent apartments with more moderate rent apartments to serve people across the income spectrum.

In addition to the HIF-funded projects noted above, Lutheran Social Services also manages projects that make federal rent assistance available to tenants via USDA Rural Development of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, as well as non-subsidized properties. Our experience as a landlord to over 900 households across rural North Dakota, is that having access to a safe, decent affordable place to live is absolutely essential to

their wellbeing. The housing is what provides a base level of stability from which each of those individuals can build a stable and successful life.

While our individual Housing Incentive Fund projects are not built specifically to serve any specific “special needs population”, they do serve people with special needs – every single day. We – today – are providing housing for veterans who had previously been homeless, seniors who are living alone on fixed incomes, young working families who struggle to make ends meet, people in recovery from addiction and/or mental illness, men and women exiting the justice system and returning to community. People who are new to our communities and people who have been our neighbors for decades. Regular North Dakotans. Who have one thing in common – they need a safe, decent affordable place to live.

The investment of resources contemplated in SB2271 for the Housing Incentive Fund can be part of making sure North Dakota has strong affordable housing infrastructure that meets the needs of people living in communities all across the state. And the proposed modification to the targeting of the fund will help ensure that this tool can continue to be used in ways that can best benefit the people and communities of our state, depending on their unique needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you have for me.

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