

**Testimony of Shannon Schutt
North Dakota Recreation & Park Association
To Senate Appropriations Committee
In Support of SB 2345
Monday, November 8, 2021**

Chairman Holmberg and Members of the Committee, my name is Shannon Schutt, and I am the executive director of the North Dakota Recreation & Park Association (NDRPA). We represent more than 900 members, primarily park districts, and work to advance parks, recreation and conservation for an enhanced quality of life in North Dakota. We are in support of SB 2345.

Section 1, subsection 5 of the bill provides \$5 million in matching grant funds to local park districts to renovate and upgrade existing outdoor facilities. The grant program will help with various park district infrastructure needs.

Park districts are separate political subdivisions and separate taxing entities from cities, like counties and school districts. Approximately 50% of their revenue is generated from programs and fees. The remaining portion comes from property taxes and state aid. They use those funding mechanisms for infrastructure projects. ARPA funds awarded to cities and counties from the federal government has not included park districts.

We are aware some revisions to the proposed grant program may be presented. We'd like to express our support in removing the word "outdoor" from the bill language as well as revising the amount each park district could receive from \$1.5 million to \$500,000 to allow more park districts to apply and receive the funding. We would also like to offer our assistance in determining the funding criteria for the grant program.

Parks and recreation are essential public services and a valuable part of community infrastructure. Providing safe, affordable and accessible recreation opportunities for citizens and visitors is essential to maintaining a high quality of life in North Dakota that attracts and retains workforce and engages tourists.

We appreciate the legislature's consideration for funding for park district infrastructure needs. Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for this bill.