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Good afternoon, Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee. I am Karla Aldinger and I am the Unit Director of Life Safety and Construction (LSC) within the Division of Public Health at the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (Department). I am here in support of House Bill 1045.

The 2019 North Dakota State Legislature established a requirement allowing licensed providers an option to utilize third-party plan reviewers who have a contract with the State of North Dakota. That option has been available since August 2020; to date, two (2) third-party reviewers have been utilized. The provision in House Bill 1045 would allow the Department to have the authority to require the licensed provider to use a third-party reviewer if the current workload, or the scope of projects under review, does not permit us to meet the specified review timelines as noted in Senate Bill 2241.

During the past year, the Department has run into issues when providing the option to utilize a third-party plan reviewer.

One example of an issue occurred when a licensed provider did not want to pay the third-party reviewer's fee and initially held up the project from being reviewed. During negotiations of review service fees, the owner would not accept the cost of the third-party plan review fee plus the LSC oversight cost. In the end, to make the project proceed in a timely manner, it was determined that LSC would handle the licensed provider review response comments within our fees, which typically would be handled by the third-party plan review vendor. The owner agreed to this arrangement, but this added a burden to LSC's already heavy workload. This delay also prevented us from meeting our specified timeline.

If it is left up to the licensed provider, they could walk away from the third-party reviewer due to the third-party reviewer's fee and then it falls back on

LSC's plate to complete the review. This does not align with the intent of the legislation in 2019.

This bill would provide the Department the authority to require the licensed provider to use a third-party reviewer depending on the Department's workload at the time of project submission.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.