

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Commissioner Gardner, and I serve on behalf of Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to present today and to request your support for special legislation authorizing a local option sales tax for our community.

Kandiyohi County continues to grow as a regional center for employment, commerce, and public services in west-central Minnesota. With that growth comes increased demand on our public infrastructure—particularly within our justice system and health and human services.

To address these needs responsibly, the County is seeking legislative authority to allow our voters to consider a one-half of one percent local sales tax to fund two critical capital projects.

The first is a new Justice Center in Willmar. This facility will replace outdated and fragmented spaces with a modern, secure, and efficient campus. It will serve not only Kandiyohi County residents, but also the broader region, including the Eighth Judicial District, which brings in judges, attorneys, jurors, and residents from surrounding counties. Consolidating services in one location will improve public access, enhance safety, reduce inmate transport risks, and create long-term operational efficiencies.

The second project is the expansion and renovation of our Health and Human Services Building, moving toward a centralized Government Center model. This investment will allow residents to access multiple services in one location, reducing barriers and improving outcomes for individuals and families. It also maximizes the use of existing county-owned space, reduces duplication, and creates long-term cost savings.

Together, these projects are estimated at approximately \$67.8 million. A local sales tax is the most equitable funding mechanism available, as it allows us to share the cost with the many non-residents who utilize these regional services every day. Based on our estimates, the tax would generate approximately \$4.2 million annually over 25 years.

Importantly, this request does not impose a tax today. It simply allows the Legislature to grant authority for a local decision. The final determination will rest with the voters of Kandiyohi County through a referendum.

We have documented the regional significance of these projects, and followed the requirements outlined in Minnesota Statutes. These investments are not only necessary—they are strategic, fiscally responsible, and designed to serve both current and future generations.

We respectfully ask for your support in advancing this special legislation so that our residents may have the opportunity to vote on this important investment in our region.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.

-