

HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
January 22, 2021 – 10 AM

North Dakota Department of Transportation
Karin Mongeon, Safety Division Director
HCR 3004

Good morning Chairman Ruby and members of the Committee. My name is Karin Mongeon. I serve as the Safety Division Director for the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT).

I am here today on behalf of the NDDOT in opposition of House Concurrent Resolution 3004, a resolution that urges the NDDOT to use dynamic message signs (DMS) solely for weather-related, road condition, emergency, work zone, and missing persons messages.

Since 2014, the NDDOT has used the DMS for traffic safety messages to encourage safe driving and riding choices by motorists on North Dakota roads. Broad public information and education is a component of the North Dakota Vision Zero strategy to reduce motor vehicle fatalities and serious injuries to zero and the DMS assist to distribute effective safety messages.

The NDDOT has developed guidance that complies with federal regulation related to the appropriate use of DMS for public safety messages. Per this guidance, the DMS are: (1) used for safety messages only during planned traffic safety campaigns to advance public awareness of the campaigns; (2) displayed for short periods (not to exceed three days); and (3) used only when the DMS boards are not in use for other priority purposes including weather-related, road conditions, emergency, work zone, and missing person situations.

Since using the DMS for safety purposes, the NDDOT has identified many uses for the DMS to advance safety and has received a significant amount of positive feedback about the messages and requests to add new messages to the rotation. A few examples include:

- The NDDOT displayed relevant motorcycle messages on the DMS before and during the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota.
- The NDDOT received a note of thanks from an emergency medical services (EMS) provider for a DMS message that reminded motorists to move over for emergency vehicles. The EMS provider was driving an ambulance transfer from Dickinson to Bismarck with their emergency lights on. The EMS provider said that most vehicles pulled over for them as a result of the message when typically few drivers pull over.
- A farmer in rural North Dakota requested that the NDDOT add a message for motorists to watch for slow moving equipment during harvest season. This message is now used regularly during the months of harvest.
- A child injury prevention program requested that the NDDOT add the message *Never Leave a Child Behind. Hot Cars Can Kill.* to prevent child fatalities through heatstroke. This message is now used regularly during the hot summer months.
- The NDHP periodically requests messages to heighten awareness of planned enforcement on specific highway segments.

There are many studies on the efficacy of public health and safety messages. Studies show that people respond to simple messages over complex and that repeat exposure to a simple message can change behavior.

A research study conducted in 2020 by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Vehicle Research and Testing Center showed that drivers found non-traditional safety messages on DMS effective and DMS messages about distracted driving, messages that include humor, and messages that use word play and rhymes ranked high among multiple measures of effectiveness.

Additionally, there is no evidence of driver distraction as a result of safety messages displayed on DMS.

The NDDOT supports the use of DMS for distribution of safety messages because simple reminders to buckle up, drive sober, not text and drive, and not to leave a child behind in a hot car, can save lives and saving lives on North Dakota roads is the mission of the NDDOT and the goal of Vision Zero.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.