



Board of Commissioners

Darek Vetsch
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Representative Frank Hornstein
Chair, House Transportation Finance and Policy Division
Minnesota House of Representatives
545 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Hornstein and Members of the House Transportation Committee:

Wright County is deeply interested in the discussion about driver testing, and as a County Board, we have significant concerns about the Department of Driver and Vehicle Services (DVS) approach to addressing its massive testing backlog. Wright County is a growing county of more than 136,000 residents, making us the 10th largest county in the state. Our county seat of Buffalo, Minnesota is typically home to a DVS testing center, but that facility is currently closed. DVS has not provided any indication to County leaders why our local testing center was not one of those that was re-opened as part of its plan, nor any information about whether we should expect it to re-open.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all driver testing in the state and worsened the existing testing backlog, many Wright County residents were being unserved or underserved. Despite our area's population, the Buffalo testing center was only open for two days each week for about 5 hours each day. In 2019, this testing center conducted 1,132 Class D road tests and 4,580 knowledge tests, which still fell short of demand. Often, residents were forced to wait months for testing at the Buffalo site or travel long distances to find a testing center with the capacity to serve them. Neither option was acceptable at the time, but the current approach has made things worse.

By executing a plan that severely limits the number of testing sites available, DVS has turned an already burdensome task into a half-day or full-day trip that can result in travel costs and time away from work—luxuries many families in our area do not have. We share DVS's goal of maximizing testing efficiency and addressing the state's testing backlog. However, we are not solving the underlying issues and creating new ones if we pursue efficiency in a way that simply shifts time, cost, and logistical burdens from the agency itself onto the residents it is supposed to serve.

Moreover, despite being the 10th largest County in the state, we are fearful that the testing center in Buffalo will never re-open. In fact, the first indication the County received that we may lose our testing site in favor of consolidating staff in a center in Hennepin County was before Minnesota even had its first confirmed case of COVID-19. With our growing population and rapidly developing communities, this is a time to enhance service in Wright County not to cut it.

We urge DVS to reach out to local government leaders in Wright County and other areas of the state to find collaborative solutions. We ask DVS to make clear to local governments and residents when and how it will decide whether to re-open the testing center in Buffalo and others around the state. We are also open to options to enhance online access to DVS services to alleviate some of these burdens.

We ask that you also consider the approach taken by HF 3300, which was introduced during the regular session. This bill would allow counties like ours the option to provide testing services through our Deputy Registrar offices. If DVS cannot meet the state's sizable demand, delegating that authority to counties is eminently reasonable, and we stand ready to help meet the demand.

We urge DVS to take this feedback into consideration and ask both DVS and this committee to try and view this issue through the lens of the people.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darek Vetsch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Darek Vetsch
District 2 Commissioner

Cc: Wright County House members