

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

Colonel Brandon Solberg, Superintendent

Hello Chairman Sorvaag and members of the Senate Appropriations Education and Environment Division. My name is Brandon Solberg, and I serve as the superintendent of the North Dakota Highway Patrol. I am supportive of Senate Bill 2016 which includes funding for a watch center (or a joint operations center).

A 24-hour joint operations center would be a new concept for North Dakota so it's not easy to identify all the benefits that it would bring at this point, but it would certainly enhance real-time information sharing and emergency response coordination during public safety incidents.

The highway patrol has engaged with the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services (DES) to identify potential solutions to improve efficiency and better coordinate emergency and disaster response through a joint operations center, and these discussions are ongoing.

The highway patrol would benefit from a 24-hour joint operations center during events such as natural disasters and while issuing emergency public alerts such as Amber alerts related to a child abduction. An established joint operations center would ensure a properly trained individual is always ready and able to issue a public alert after it has been vetted and authorized by the highway patrol or bureau of criminal investigation.

The highway patrol is responsible for the security and protection of the governor, legislative members, and the North Dakota Supreme Court, and the joint operation center's continual monitoring of open-source data for potential threats would increase situational awareness and improve the sharing of essential intelligence.

The highway patrol provides statewide coverage and often assists local law enforcement agencies with calls for service. A joint operations center would help coordinate a multi-agency response to large-scale incidents. For example, a joint operations center could have assisted agencies like the highway patrol and department of transportation during last year's protest activity at the Pembina-Emerson border by providing real-time updates in coordination with Canadian authorities. Another example from last year would have been the coordination of emergency response activities during long duration winter storms.

In conclusion, the highway patrol supports the development of a state joint operations center with 24-hour capabilities. This type of operation would greatly enhance our ability to gather information, plan strategically, and respond quickly and effectively to emergencies that occur within the state. This concept would ultimately help the highway patrol meet its mission to keep North Dakota and its citizens safe and secure.