Testimony: The I-229 Infrastructure Accountability Crisis

I. The Fishbowl Reality

"Members of the committee, I am here regarding the I-229 corridor, specifically how the fragmented construction—from Exit 6 down to the future project at 26th and Cliff Avenue—creates a systemic danger for our community. To understand the risk, imagine a fishbowl. At the top, the 'sharks'—the Feds—provide the funding mandates. The 'whales'—the State—steer the resources, while the 'porpoises'—the City—facilitates the process and keeps the public calm. But trapped at the bottom, in the 'saturated sponge' basin of the Big Sioux landscape, are the 'goldfish': our students at Lincoln Senior High and our neighborhood families. We are being turned into a sacrificial retention basin for a project that prioritizes frictionless highway transit over our physical safety."

II. The Mechanics of Sacrifice

"This hierarchy uses engineering to enforce its priorities. The 'Project Team'—including SDDOT, the City, and firms like HRGreen and SEH—builds reinforced MSE walls for the highway, while leaving the community to rely on vulnerable dirt berms on an unstable foundation. Private contractors like Soukup Construction act as 'cleaner fish,' prioritizing their contract status over the public interest. Specifically, Soukup is listed in municipal stormwater portals as the contractor of record for stormwater systems protecting Lincoln High. Yet, they simultaneously acted as a highway contractor for projects on the I-229 corridor that fundamentally altered the drainage basin feeding that exact school. This is a direct, systemic conflict of interest: they were tasked with highway expansion while being the firm responsible for the very stormwater infrastructure that highway work threatened. If you doubt the impact, look at the school's physical entrance. It was recently elevated—a costly, reactive engineering correction necessitated by the highway project's disruption of natural drainage. We do not know what was negotiated behind closed doors, but the lack of public disclosure regarding this contractor's dual role is why I am here: to demand that this conflict be brought into the light."

"T&R Contracting is also culpable, operating alongside key material suppliers and subcontractors like Knife River whose heavy equipment and aggregate supply chains dominate the adjacent neighborhood while major interstate work progresses. Working the local corridors and the interstate simultaneously—with zero public disclosure of these overlapping roles—creates a direct conflict of interest and a complete failure of the oversight measures the GOAC is intended to enforce."

III. The Failure of Deference & The GOAC Mandate

"When you hear from the City or State, they will claim they must defer to 'federal highway priority.' Do not accept this. This is a distraction they use to deflect accountability for the local disasters they have personally engineered. They use a 'salami-slicing' tactic, breaking this massive corridor into small segments to ensure each one falls just below the threshold for rigorous federal oversight.

The GOAC is the only entity that sits outside this fishbowl. You have the authority to hold the sharks, whales, and porpoises accountable. I am requesting that this committee break the chain of 'contract priority' and commission an independent, third-party geotechnical safety audit that ignores who holds the contract and focuses entirely on the structural survival of the Lincoln High campus and the entire I-229 corridor. Will you allow this corridor-wide sacrifice to continue, or will you demand the independent truth our safety requires?"