



House Appropriations Committee (Education and Environment Division) - SB 2019

Representative David Monson, Chair

March 11, 2021

Chairman Monson, Members of the Committee:

My name is Brian Ritter and I'm President the Bismarck Mandan Chamber EDC. I am here today on behalf of our organization's approximately 1,200 members in support of SB 2019.

As the organization dedicated to expanding the economy of Bismarck-Mandan and the surrounding area, we are well aware of the single greatest barrier to us doing so; workforce. Specifically, Job Service North Dakota estimates that there are currently 2,736 open jobs between Burleigh and Morton Counties. Furthermore, not all of those jobs are in one specific industry or occupational group; they're stratified across several different ones.

To try and fill those thousands of open jobs, in the short term, Bismarck-Mandan has enacted strategies such as social media campaigns in select cities and targeted mailings to Bismarck-Mandan expatriates in out-of-state markets to entice them to move to our community. In the long term, we have developed workforce development initiatives such as a job shadow program and experiential learning opportunities for educators, but more is needed.

Enter our state's career academies.

More specifically, Bismarck Public Schools has already constructed a Career Academy on the campus of Bismarck State College that is the model for the rest of the State. High school students from across Bismarck-Mandan can take career and technical education (CTE) courses at the

Bismarck Career Academy in fields ranging from welding and auto body to healthcare and graphic design. And that diversity is important because as I noted previously, our community has open jobs in both 'white collar' and 'blue collar' fields, alike.

What's more is that students can do so during the course of their regular school day by taking required courses at their home school and CTE courses at the Bismarck Career Academy. Doing so can not only prepare them for the workforce should they not choose to pursue a post-secondary education, but also put them in a position to reach a post-secondary certification that much sooner if they choose to do so. All at a cost that's affordable and attainable for our community's residents.

Admittedly, SB 2019 is much more than just funding for career academies across the State. Whether CTE courses are taught in facilities like this, a classroom or somewhere else entirely, all of North Dakota will benefit once more and more students have access to them (CTE courses). However, a new or expanded career academy here in Bismarck-Mandan directly addresses our business community's greatest need and for that reason, we strongly support SB 2019.

We would respectfully ask that this Committee give a DO PASS recommendation to SB 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Ritter, President
Bismarck Mandan Chamber EDC