



2021 HB 1142
House Appropriations Human Resources Division
Representative Jon Nelson, Chairman
February 8, 2021

Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Division, I am Tim Blasl, President of the North Dakota Hospital Association (NDHA). I am here to testify in support of House Bill 1142. I ask that you give this bill a **Do Pass** recommendation.

Hospitals are in support of the bill because it will lessen the shortage of health care professionals in North Dakota. The bill will provide an appropriation to the Department of Commerce for the purpose of providing matching funds to an organization assisting in the recruitment, distribution, and supply, and enhancing the quality and efficiency of personnel providing health services in rural areas of the state.

As you know, workforce challenges threaten access to health care services, especially in rural areas where it can be hard to recruit and retain workers. We experienced that in sharp focus during the height of COVID-19 hospitalizations last fall. Without nurses, physicians, and other health care professionals, it does not matter how many beds we physically add to our hospitals. We need trained health care professionals to be able to care for patients.

Even before the pandemic, there was a serious and growing health care professional shortage. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of healthcare occupations is projected to grow 19 percent from 2014 to 2024 - much faster than the average for all occupations. During this time, health care occupations will add more jobs than any other group of occupations. This growth is expected due to an aging population, growing rates of chronic conditions such as diabetes and obesity, and a retiring labor force – all things that will be with us long after the COVID-19 pandemic has passed.

Despite strong interest in healthcare careers, thousands of qualified applicants cannot gain entry into a training program. Recruiting health care professionals in North Dakota will require ongoing, targeted investment in training programs to increase faculty, allow seamless transitions between undergraduate degree programs, and provide incentives for providers to participate in clinical training of students. Retention of health care workers will also be key to ensuring the workforce shortage does not grow.

In summary, NDHA supports this legislation to assist in the recruitment, distribution, and supply of qualified health care professionals in the rural areas of the state. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim Blasl, President
North Dakota Hospital Association