

From: Taya Spelhaug

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Subject: Support for SB 2272; Career Builders Program

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Taya Spelhaug. I'm a resident of West Fargo, a member of TechND and the TechSpark Manager of North Dakota at Microsoft. Thank you for the opportunity to share my support of Senate Bill 2272.

It is well known that ND has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the US. However, ND still has over 30,000 jobs waiting to be filled. Many of these jobs are in the skilled worker and technology industries. Jobs that are critical to the growth of our state, especially in the small towns that North Dakota is mostly made up of. But, again, this is well known.

What might not be as widely known, is the how critical the Career Builders Program is to filling those 30,000 jobs, the growth of our small towns and ultimately the success of North Dakota as a whole. This program not only helps people stay and work in the state after their education, but it entices individuals to come to ND for their education from the start. I see Higher Education as one of the best recruitment tools we have in our state and when I worked for North Dakota State College of Science as the Director of Career Services, I received an up-close seat to this. So how does Career Builders come into play here? Each institution has a strategy to recruit students. Often, they use staff and faculty to go out and talk to high schools and career groups about how wonderful their program is, in hopes they can entice that student to come to their institution. The Career Builders Program is an added carrot that these faculty and staff can use. College dept insecurities are real and if a student hears they are likely to get some of that dept paid, they are more likely to come to that ND institution vs another out of state intuition.

It also has the opportunity to increase enrollment at ND intuitions. If Ivan Mass, Chair of NDSCS's Electrical Department, can recruit more students because of the Career Builders program he will be able to hire more faculty to increase the capacity of their program thus graduating more electricians to go live and work in our rural ND towns who are in desperate need of this talent. Same with Bonnie Schillinger in the Computer Science Department. More recruits equal more students equaling more capacity and ultimately more Computer Science Grads. Which will help fill our TechND member's open position and, as COVID has shown, they can work remotely from any town in ND and support that community. This is not just a Career Builder program, but it is a State Builder program that we need to invest in.

Working within Microsoft Philanthropies one of the main objectives of TechSpark is to make investments into rural America to create jobs and grow economic development. We have seen how successful programs like Career Builders can be to other states like WA and SD. That is why we invested \$25,000 to the Career Builders program. As I've stated, this investment will get more students to come to ND and stay to work. However, we need additional businesses in North Dakota to see the value of this program and what an investment into it would mean for the future of their business and North Dakota. I'm happy that a percentage of the appropriations have been set aside to help with the promotion of the Career Builders Program. This will help those businesses in North Dakota understand the implications and allow for more true investment. However, a half percent is not near enough, and I support an increase to a full one percent or more.

80 students in the last 2 years staying, working, and thriving in ND is great, but can you imagine the impact that over 2,000 workers in 2 years would have on our State. 2,000 people living in communities you sever to help fill the critically needed jobs and grow their economies. I am all in favor of seeing that dream come true. I'm here today to ask that you support and pass Senate Bill 2272 and become a major contributor to the success your communities and ultimately, North Dakota. Thank you for your time and consideration.