

Testimony in support of SB 2301

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Chairman Kreun, Members of the Committee – I am grateful for the opportunity to stand before you in support of Senate Bill 2301. LIUNA is grateful for the support we've received from Senators Mathern and Dever and Representatives Boschee, Kempenich and Brandenburg – sponsoring this bill.

I am marking nearly seven years working with the Laborers International Union of North America and am a member of Local 563, which serves all of North Dakota and a large segment of Minnesota.

The Laborers Union has been working in all aspects of energy-related construction projects. For decades we have been a huge part of North Dakota's coal-fired generation plants. We are known for our skill in pipeline construction – having played an integral part in building the Dakota Access Pipeline. LIUNA throughout North America has been building wind and solar farms and will continue to fight for all forms of energy.

For years prior to this role, I work in major corporate communication roles. This job gives me the opportunity to work directly with our North Dakota construction workforce, watching their successes on local projects and listening to their disappointments when companies and contractors coming in from other states hire their own workforce – displacing local workers. We get dozens of calls from non-union construction workers wanting to know if we can place them in jobs because they are disappointed in not being hired on local projects, despite having years of experience.

For many years, our organization has tracked hundreds of various construction projects, many that require approval from the North Dakota Public Service Commission. We have testified before the PSC on dozens of projects – supporting the industry and good contractors that choose both union and non-union workers.

At the heart of our mission and testimony is the need to prioritize North Dakota workers. We listen to testimony by companies saying they are committed to local workforce, but when we visit jobsites – especially windfarm construction sites – barely any local workforce is present. At the core of our want, we requested multiple times that companies report local vs. out-of-state workers coming to North Dakota.

This bill would add to the Public Service Commission's reporting requirements to simply report where workers are coming from, which should be a huge additional burden on individual companies. In addition, maximizing and prioritizing local workforce efforts includes increasing recruitment efforts throughout the state to draw in local workers

During economic uncertainties brought on by the pandemic and the collapse of the oil markets in early 2020, we need to make certain our North Dakota men and women are being looked at first to fill high paying construction jobs. There are 100s of skilled union and non-union workers available to fill these positions. In addition, we still have a core of our workforce that is under-employed or working more than one job to make ends meet. Construction training programs throughout the state and apprenticeship programs can elevate individuals into strong living wages, with benefits and health insurance that will all raise a standard of living for families throughout North Dakota.

Two colleges - Lake Region State College and Bismarck State College – have renewable energy programs. I am certain students in those programs that want to stay in North Dakota would want top priority for renewable jobs.

There is a finally a greater push for young men and women to consider construction trades and skilled apprenticeship programs if they are not aiming for a four-year degree. This is definitely a growing trend in the state and we want for a new generation of workforce to be able to stay in the state with their families.

I thank you for the opportunity to be before you today.