Testimony of Justin Forde
President
Technology Council of North Dakota

In Support of HB 1507
Nov. 8, 2021

Members of the Joint Technical Committee,

My name is Justin Forde. I am the senior director of government relations for Midco and serve as the president of the Technology Council of North Dakota (TechND), whose mission is to promote the use, growth and development of technology in North Dakota. I am here today on behalf of TechND to voice the technology industry's support of HB 1507 which makes computer and cyber science courses available to all K-12 students statewide and incorporates computer and cyber science as a graduation requirement. Developing workforce is the top priority for TechND's members, representing business, education and government, and this effort is one tool in preparing students for the careers of the future.

Computer science drives job growth and innovation throughout our economy and society. Computing occupations are the number one source of all new wages in the U.S. and make up over half of all projected new jobs in STEM fields. Computing is used all around us and in virtually every field, including industries essential to North Dakota's economy, such as energy, agriculture, finance and health care. It is foundational knowledge that all students need.

However, only 44% of all public high schools in North Dakota teach a foundational course. This is below the 47% national average. Additionally, only 3.9% of students graduate with even a foundational computer science course. This is of concern to TechND given there are currently 1,550 vacant computing jobs in North Dakota with an avearge salary of more than $73,000. Over the next decade, 7,500 new and replacement technology positions will be needed in North Dakota across ALL industries. It doesn't matter if a student wants to be a doctor or run the family farm, technology impacts everything. North Dakota has the opputunity to develop the skills of our students to leverage technology and turn those skills into a true competitive advantage.

Understanding the significant impact computer science has on our workforce, TechND has been a long-time supporter of the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) efforts to increase availibilty of computer and

cyber science courses, including providing industry insight in DPI's adoption of the K-12 computer and cybersecurity standards in 2019, which made North Dakota the first to create such standards.

We encourage you to support this initaitve during this Special Session as North Dakota has a unique opportunity to act now as to not miss a one-time opportunity to use ESSER funding to cover the costs associated with getting computer and and cyber science in every K-12 school across the state.

On behalf of TechND, I urge your favorable consideration of HB 1507 to provide North Dakota students with foundational skills necessary for virtually all future jobs in North Dakota, the nation and the world.