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January 23, 2023

Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Eric Ripley, Executive Director of Career & Technical Education (CTE) for the Grand Forks Public Schools and Director of the virtual Grand Forks Area Career & Technology Center. I am communicating my opposition to HB1163 as it is currently written, relating to the optional career and technical education diploma pathway.

In May 2018, I had the privilege to serve as the Team Lead for the Graduation Requirements/Carnegie Unit work group that was part of Governor Burgum's Innovative Education focus. Our work group's collective efforts laid the foundation for future recommendations and legislative bills related to the development of a personalized, proficiency-based graduation pathway, which exists in the format of the DPI Innovation Waiver and subsequent legislation last session to allow a local board approved learning continuum.

In concept, HB1163 has my support. With all of the attention towards helping students become Choice Ready after high school, development of another pathway to a high school diploma can be helpful in this regard. I also believe there is a sizable engagement gap, relevance, and effort provided by students between what courses they "have" to complete vs. what courses they "want" to complete.

My concerns and opposition to HB1163 would be related to the need for a minimum GPA (and at a 1.66, which feeds into the misperception that CTE is only for students that struggle in school). GPA is not a component of the existing high school diploma requirements. Additionally, the requirement of an ACT / WorkKeys score seems misplaced in that while the North Dakota Scholarship utilizes a minimum score for scholarship eligibility, I do not believe a student's ability to graduate high school be contingent upon a single exam. I would question whether a student under this diploma pathway would still meet the entrance requirements for all of the North Dakota higher education institutions. Finally, there may be access limitations for students to the required work-based learning component as that can be dependent upon program area, partnering industries, and geographical location.

Alternate CTE Diplomas are utilized within numerous other states, and I have been a proponent for this discussion for a long time. However, at this point and upon my review of the bill's language, I remain opposed to HB1163 as written. I would respectfully ask the committee's consideration for the bill to be turned into a study which would allow adequate time to fully vet out the various components of the bill and potential impact for students.

Sincerely,

Eric Ripley
Executive Director of CTE & Technology
Grand Forks Public Schools
Grand Forks Area Career & Technology Center