

**Testimony of Dana Hager
Economic Development Association of North Dakota
In Support of HB 1240
January 23, 2023**

Chair Louser and members of the House Industry, Business and Labor, my name is Dana Hager, executive director of the Economic Development Association of North Dakota. On behalf of EDND, I ask for your support of HB 1240.

EDND represents more than 80 rural and urban economic development organizations on the front line of growing businesses and communities in North Dakota. The organization's primary purpose is to promote the creation of new wealth throughout North Dakota in order to develop more vibrant communities and improve quality of life.

Workforce availability is the most significant challenge facing North Dakota businesses and limits the growth potential of the state's economy. EDND supports the development of workforce attraction, development and retention strategies that address the needs of the state's businesses. As of November 2022, North Dakota had an unemployment rate of 1.9 percent, and workforce is high on the priority list for businesses of every size.

EDND understands that the ability of North Dakota businesses to maximize the state's economic development will depend on their capacity to attract and retain a 21st century workforce. North Dakota will benefit from connecting the future workforce with resources and education to be placed in a high-demand career path. Connecting businesses and education through programs and statewide-level efforts will keep North Dakota communities open for business.

The North Dakota Career Builders Scholarship and Loan Repayment Program was established to aid in attraction and retention of individuals in high-demand occupations. The scholarship program also encourages high school students to consider these career paths more carefully, with the knowledge that there will be jobs waiting for them in North Dakota after graduation.

This program has been in place since 2019 and experienced a significant increase in participation after a statewide marketing effort funded the program again during the 2021 legislative session. With more than 80 workforce partners and donors in the scholarship and loan program and 23 partners in the loan repayment program, this is proving to be effective tool for businesses in both large and small communities. The skilled workforce student loan repayment program helps students transition to local jobs, and help communities secure and retain qualified staff.

During a time when every tool to educate, train and retain our future workers is essential, please consider a do-pass for HB 1240. Thank you.