

TESTIMONY OF

Katie Ralston Howe, Director, Workforce Development Division

Chair Louser and members of the House Industry, Business, & Labor Committee, my name is Katie Ralston Howe, workforce director for the ND Department of Commerce, and I'm here in support of the amendments introduced by Senator Lee. In my role, I also have the pleasure of serving as the director of the industry-led Workforce Development Council (WDC), which advises the Governor and the public concerning the nature and extent of workforce development needs in ND and identifies ways to effectively meet these needs. The Council has five core areas on which our work focuses: earlier and more diverse career exploration, addressing the technical skills gap, removing barriers to employment, recruitment and retention of ND workers, and occupational licensure reform. We have subcommittees dedicated to researching and developing recommendations to address challenges each of these areas. Today, I'd like to share information regarding research we've done on occupational licensure in ND throughout the last three years.

In February 2020, the WDC created a subcommittee made up of legislators and a cross-functional group of representatives of those affected by ND's occupational licensing framework, including business and representatives of populations that experience barriers to entering or moving throughout the workforce, such as justice involved individuals, dislocated workers, and military members and spouses. The goal of this subcommittee is to remove unnecessary barriers to employment while preserving the health and safety of ND citizens and promoting competition. To accomplish this, the subcommittee has studied ND's schema for occupational licensing to develop a thorough understanding of licensing in our state; discover best practices; engage licensing boards and commissions; and identify the best path for reform.

Previous legislation in the 2019 and 2021 Legislative Sessions that gave Commerce the ability to collect information from the boards was primarily focused on expediting licensure for military members and spouses; however, we also asked questions about timeline to licensure, policies related to criminal conviction, initial and continuing education requirements, annual costs for licensees, current reciprocity environment, and more. Engagement with our boards through survey and listening sessions is valuable as it informs future reform efforts related to our goal of removing barriers to employment in ND. Given the success of our efforts to date, expertise, and alignment with the Workforce Development Council, we believe the opportunity to study and collect a report from the boards should remain with the Department of Commerce, rather than moving to the Department of Labor and Human Rights.

I'm happy to answer any questions today and as you continue to work on this bill. Thank you.