

Dear Representative Nathe,
Chairman, House Appropriations – Education and Environment Division

I am writing to express my strong support for the Department of Commerce Appropriations bill, SB 2018, which funds critical economic development programs in North Dakota. As the Co-founder & CEO of Homeland Hemp Co., I have directly benefited from the Innovate ND Program, which has been instrumental in getting our company off the ground. Our primary goal as a company, since inception 7 years ago, has been to use locally sourced materials grown in North Dakota (our 'homeland') for our products to create resilient supply chains. After 7 years we reached that goal earlier this year, and it would not have been possible without the help and support we got early on from economic development programs, like InnovateND.

The business coaching and funding provided through this program offered these key benefits:

- Customer engagement: We were able to take the time to define who our customer is, then begin to collect feedback from them over time to see if what we were producing was actually what the market wanted. This is simple hindsight but most businesses don't take the time to connect with customers like we did while involved in this state program.
- Strategic non-dilutive funding: This helped us early on because our company was essentially worth nothing at the start, we couldn't even get a business bank account when we first began! We are now working on raising additional funds through investors who see tangible value in the company, value that has been developed over time and through ND support.

Without this funding to help us get started we would not have made it this far. The industry we operate in is young and growing rapidly in the US. We have had the opportunity to help shape this industry and have significant influence on how it has developed due to the support we have received from the state. Along with this we have been able to create new outlets for our North Dakota farmers.

I urge you to support Innovate ND in SB 2018 to ensure businesses like mine continue to have access to the resources necessary for success. Thank you for your time and consideration. If you would like to discuss my experience further, please feel free to contact me, my information is below.

Sincerely,

Matt Marino

Co-founder & CEO at Homeland Hemp Co.

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