

Chairman Nathe and members of the committee,

Thank you for considering my testimony. My name is Savanna Hendrickson, and I currently serve as the President of our county Economic Development Council and the President of a community bank that serves two rural communities in North Dakota. I'm writing to express my strong support for the restoration of full funding of \$10 million for the Regional Workforce Impact Program (RWIP) as outlined in state commerce budget bill SB 2018.

As someone deeply involved in the economic development and financial well-being of our rural communities, I witness firsthand the challenges we face daily. Issues such as economic development, workforce recruitment, workforce retention, and job creation are persistent and pressing concerns that require substantial support to address effectively. The proposed reduction from \$10 million to \$5 million would significantly impact the positive momentum and critical initiatives that have been established in North Dakota communities through this program.

Our Economic Development Council has been fortunate to receive two grants through the RWIP program, which have been instrumental in addressing key needs and fostering growth in our county. The first grant enabled us to launch a local CDL training program, providing four individuals with the necessary training and licensing to meet the high demand for commercial drivers in our agricultural area. This initiative not only addressed a critical workforce shortage but also contributed to the overall economic stability of our region. Additionally, the grant supported the rollout of a behavioral health program at our local clinic, which has been vital in improving the well-being of our workforce.

The second grant was allocated to a Talent Attraction Marketing Campaign aimed at increasing awareness of our county and the opportunities it offers. Although this project is still ongoing, we have already observed positive results, including increased interest and inquiries from potential new residents. This campaign would not have been possible without the support of the RWIP program, and its success is crucial for our county's future growth and development.

According to the 2020 census, our county in northwest North Dakota has a population of 2,195. Unlike larger counties with substantial oil or other income, our primary industry is agriculture, and the income generated does not significantly stay within the county. Consequently, funding for initiatives well beyond essential infrastructure is extremely limited. State support through programs like RWIP is essential for our county to remain viable and continue progressing towards sustainable growth.

In conclusion, I urge you to consider the profound impact that the RWIP program has had on North Dakota communities and to restore the funding to the full \$10 million request. This investment is critical for the future of North Dakota's workforce and economic development.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

*Savanna Hendrickson*

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