

Chairman Nathe and Members of the House Appropriations – Education and Environment Division,

I am Mark Lyman, Economic Development Specialist for the Minot Area Chamber EDC (MACEDC). On behalf of the MACEDC and our over 600 member investors, I offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 2018 to appropriate funding for the North Dakota Department of Commerce.

The MACEDC mission is to advocate for and invest in business activity by being a collaborative partner in the community, focused on improving quality of life for all. MACEDC has five key strategic pillars, four of these pillars focus on economic, workforce, community development, and military support. We believe that Senate Bill 2018 would have a positive impact on these key pillars and will assist our great state in continuing to grow and thrive.

We work on a regular basis with almost every division of the North Dakota Department of Commerce and enjoy a good relationship with the staff there to assist our city and region in maximizing the use of the various programs and incentives that are available.

One relatively new program that I would like to highlight in this testimony is the Regional Workforce Impact Program – or RWIP. In 2022, during the first round of RWIP funding, our office led the northcentral North Dakota effort in applying for \$1.8 million for community projects in our seven-county planning region. More than 400 hours were dedicated by MACEDC staff in the spring/summer of 2022 in working with more than 20 partner organizations in researching and writing the region's sole proposal. In close connection with Souris Basin Planning Council and other partners, research was conducted with dozens of employers, county officials, public school and higher education leaders, economic development organizations, JDAs, non-profit organizations, Job Service ND, etc. The end result of this research led to a 150+ page application requesting the federal funding tied to the first round of RWIP be used for the following programs/initiatives: CDL training/exposure equipment, Daycare Infrastructure Support, Healthcare training equipment for a new dental assistant program, Healthcare training equipment for nursing, and a regional Mobile Meats Lab. Each region across the state has different needs and RWIP supports solutions unique to each.

This funding proved invaluable in helping to complete or augment existing workforce development and economic development solutions.

During the second round of RWIP funding, in 2023/2024, the program moved from a regionally lead effort to individual applications. MACEDC applied directly to help market our WayFinders Program. WayFinders is a direct offshoot of the state's Find the Good Life effort and is a talent attraction program targeting young families, graduates, veterans, and boomerangs. WayFinders is designed to funnel new employees/residents to our region building new relationships with existing residents to deepen their roots in our community and help them integrate into our region. Through Find the Good Life and our WayFinder program we have attracted individuals to the Minot area. All with the goal of growing our workforce, adding new residents, and allowing for relationships that can last a lifetime.

As the point person for some of these programs, and as someone who is very familiar with the success that can come from RWIP funding, I ask for your support in renewing the \$10 million request for this program under SB 2018 and to continue support for the other key programs the Department of Commerce leads for our state. I am available for any questions you may have.

Thank you,
Mark Lyman
Minot Area Chamber EDC Economic Development Specialist