

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Andrea Pfennig, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs for the Greater North Dakota Chamber. GNDC is North Dakota's largest statewide business advocacy organization, with membership represented by small and large businesses, local chambers, and trade and industry associations across the state. We stand in **support** of Senate Bill 2018.

In our 2024 ND Economics and Employer Survey of our membership, 70% of respondents indicated they were having trouble hiring employees. Labor availability has been identified as the top business concern facing companies in North Dakota.

Because of this, we'd like to express support for the workforce components of SB 2018, such as Operation Intern, the Office of Global Talent, and Regional Workforce Impact Program grants (RWIP).

We frequently receive positive feedback from our members on Operation Intern. The funding for this program is spoken for very rapidly, and we appreciate the current proposed investment of \$2 million for the program.

Additionally, our members feel it is important to foster the advancement of existing and emerging industries through efforts that demonstrate the importance of innovation and the benefits of a diversified economy.

Targeted incentives and economic development programs, such as Development Fund and LIFT, are important to position North Dakota to be globally competitive.

We hope that you will continue to strengthen North Dakota's business climate by investing in workforce and economic development strategies. Thank you for your consideration.