

March 17, 2025

RE: SB2018 – Testimony by Amy Whitney, Director of the UND Center for Innovation

Chairman Nathe and Members of the House Appropriation – Education and Environment Division:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2018. For the record, my name is Amy Whitney, Director of the UND Center for Innovation in Grand Forks, ND. Over the past six and a half years, I have had the privilege of leading our entrepreneurial center which is dedicated to supporting innovative start-up businesses in North Dakota as well as students and faculty at UND from the idea stage to commercialization. Every year, it becomes more evident how important partnerships between entrepreneurial centers and organizations like the North Dakota Department of Commerce are for fostering innovation and encouraging entrepreneurship.

Currently, the entrepreneur grants and vouchers (InnovateND) line item in SB2018 as proposed by Governor Armstrong is \$2M. We support this budget request. The InnovateND program, along with others managed by the Department of Commerce, are critical to entrepreneurial success. This program provides non-dilutive funding to early-stage businesses as well as providing essential grants for entrepreneurial centers to deliver the necessary coaching to those founders. The UND Center for Innovation is one of four centers, each with dedicated staff of various expertise, providing this vital support.

I strongly encourage passage of the Commerce appropriation bill. Doing so means Commerce and the State of North Dakota continue to provide essential programs and resources that are important for the growth and diversification of the North Dakota economy. In recent years, the Center for Innovation has worked with start-ups in different industries such as UAS, cybersecurity, agriculture, food, technology, healthcare, and others through the InnovateND program. Many of these companies have gone on to raise private capital, create new jobs, and offer impactful internships. This funding will ensure it remains an essential resource for future entrepreneurs in North Dakota.

Thank you for your time and review of this testimony today.