



Letter of Support – SB 2019

Monday, January 13th, 2025

Chairman Sorvaag and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee - Education and Environment Division,

For the record, my name is Cale Dunwoody, and I have the distinct pleasure of serving as the Vice President of Public Policy for the Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce (FMWF Chamber). On behalf of our over 1,700 members, I respectfully offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 2019 and urge the inclusion of funding for the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Capital Projects Program to complete the thirteen existing CTE projects across North Dakota.

At the FMWF Chamber, our mission is to protect and promote business, inspire individuals, cultivate communities, and influence action. Access to a high quality, skilled workforce remains a major barrier for many companies throughout North Dakota. While the shortage gap across the United States is narrowing, North Dakota remains as one of the most severe states with the U.S. Chamber estimating that there are approximately only 30 available workers for every 100 open jobs. Additionally, it is projected that there will be up to 52,000 new job openings in North Dakota between 2021 and 2031, with 71% requiring some postsecondary training. Industries such as healthcare, construction, and manufacturing are expected to experience significant growth, necessitating a skilled workforce.

To effectively compete on a global scale for talent, both the public and private sectors must invest in innovative solutions to address this workforce crisis. Access to industry-aligned CTE programming is an effective workforce solution that can significantly reduce North Dakota's workforce need. By enhancing the state's ability to provide students with diverse educational experiences—including career exploration, experiential learning, and advanced skill development—we can foster a robust pipeline of highly skilled workers, particularly in critical trade sectors.

The Cass County Career Innovation Center (CIC) plays a crucial role in preparing students throughout Cass County for the workforce. This facility will offer industry-aligned training and programming opportunities for middle and high school students from Fargo Public Schools, West Fargo Public Schools, Central Cass, and Northern Cass, as well as for post-secondary and adult learners at North Dakota State College of Science. Students will benefit from hands-on learning across various programs, including healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, and cybersecurity/IT, with opportunities to earn dual credits and industry certifications. At full capacity (87,000 sq. ft.), the Cass County CIC can serve 2,800 Cass County students. However, the facility is currently set to open on August 25, 2025, at a reduced footprint of 57,000 sq. ft., lacking critical programming such as manufacturing.

As the 69th Legislative Assembly considers Senate Bill 2006, we encourage the inclusion of additional funding to existing CTE capital projects, like the Cass County Career Innovation Center. Once complete, these facilities will be able to provide students throughout North Dakota with robust, industry aligned skill development opportunities, ultimately strengthening North Dakota's workforce environment.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your commitment to North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Cale Dunwoody
Vice President of Public Policy
Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce