



March 3, 2021

The Honorable Representative Monson
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee, EE Division
North Dakota House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to you regarding SB 2018 and State funding for the ND Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) through the ND Department of Commerce budget.

I recently received assistance from the SBDC Fargo service center and business advisor Paul Smith after first learning of the program through the SBA District Office in Fargo. The SBDC has been vital to starting my new business. Paul assisted with financial projections and investor presentations, and his knowledge, professionalism and level of caring were evident and greatly appreciated. This process required numerous on-site meetings at the SBDC office, Zoom meetings, and also face to face meetings with potential investors at their place of work. The amount of work provided to me at no cost would have been cost prohibitive through a CPA firm.

After much consideration and assistance from Paul, I started Forest Products Direct, which will offer a one-step approach to providing lumber and sheet goods to contractor customers. We will also offer doors, windows, millwork, drywall, siding and roofing products through our specialty (one-step) distributor partnerships.

I have many years of experience running existing businesses including Simonson Lumber and Miller Holdings. Starting a new business is a very difficult and stressful process – even for an experienced business person. I can't imagine what it would be like for a person who doesn't have experience. Having the services of the SBDC and Paul to bounce ideas and provide financial documents to obtain capital was invaluable.

I was amazed to learn the SBDC provided assistance to more the 1400 unique clients in 2020, helped small business owners obtain nearly 85M in capital for starting and expanding their companies, and supported 6,031 jobs in ND – all in the face of this challenging COVID-19 pandemic. And most impressive of all: 90% of small business owners who use SBDC services to start their companies are still in business after 5 years. These statistics point to the impact of the SBDC on small businesses and the economy across our state.

I would respectfully ask for your consideration of increased funding for this vital program. By continuing to fund and expand this great service, you are supporting small businesses, job creation and economic growth across North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Richard J Simonson