
March 16, 2021

Chairman Monson, Vice-Chair Schmidt, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

My name is Sonja Duerre Stromswold, and I own two small businesses in Mohall, ND. As the owner of two long-operating small businesses in North Dakota, I am writing to testify in support of the North Dakota Small Business Development Centers (ND SBDC) and their services. I have worked with and seen first-hand the impacts of the ND SBDC, so I urge you to increase the state's funding support of this incredibly impactful program. This nationally accredited program provides invaluable, no-cost business advising to small businesses all around the state and is influential in the growth of business and economic success in our state and local communities.

Both of my businesses have utilized the services of the ND SBDC since the program started in North Dakota in 1989 – 35 years ago. From starting a business to growing it, the ND SBDC and its business advisors have been invaluable to my businesses. Both businesses, The Flower House Garden Center and The Prairie Bistro, LLC, are located in rural Mohall, North Dakota. The Flower House began as a way to supplement my family's farming income in 1968. While our farm has not survived, the Flower House did, partly due to the business support and financial help from SBDC. Our advisor at the time helped us develop a business plan and helped us apply for and receive Disaster Assistance due to the poor economy in rural North Dakota at the time. We've continued to take advantage of the business advice of Mary Beth Votava, the current Center Director of the Minot Region SBDC. She has helped us improve our pricing structure, create budgets, analyze our performance, and survive the cycles of business in an area dependent on agriculture and oil. I believe it is safe to say The Flower House Garden Center would not be in business, employing 15-20 people in our small town, today if not for the support of SBDC. The Prairie Bistro, LLC began the same year the ND SBDC did, in 1989. And as with the Flower House, the local SBDC has been a steady source of support, education, and advice since I opened the business. I knew how to bake but not how to create a budget, price my product, or read a financial statement. Thanks to the ongoing support of the SBDC, we now employ 4 full staff and up to 8 part time. Neither business would be here today if not for the support of the SBDC.

Please support small business owners, local communities, and economic growth around our great state by supporting and increasing funding for the ND SBDC program. I cannot overstate the importance of their assistance, now more than ever, as small businesses like mine attempt to navigate and survive the impacts of the pandemic. The support of the ND SBDC has not only kept The Flower House Garden Center and The Prairie Bistro, LLC, but has also helped us grow. Financial support for this program will result in a healthier and more resilient small-business sector, create meaningful jobs and thriving communities, and support the overall North Dakota economy. Please support my small businesses and others like them by supporting the ND SBDC.

Sincerely,
Sonja Duerre Stromswold
