Testimony in support of SB 2272 and the Career Builders Scholarship & Student Loan Repayment program

Given by
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Board Member of Economic Development Association of ND

Chairman Owens & members of the Education Committee I am pleased to be able to offer my testimony today in support of the requested changes in SB 2272. For the last 12 years I have been personally involved with ND Career and Technical Education – first at the 2 yr. college level at NDSCS as Business Development and Alumni/Foundation Director and most recently at the local community level in my role as Economic Development Director in Devils Lake.

As an Economic Development Director in the Devils Lake region – I can attest to Workforce Recruitment and Retention as being the single biggest issue with attracting and retaining businesses to the Devils Lake area. The state of ND just does not have enough of the critical skilled workers needed to help our companies and communities grow. I spend 40-50% of my time on workforce issues and possible solutions and I know many of my fellow Economic Development peers do the same.

As part of this work, I have developed relationships with High Schools across the state of ND to help them to understand the importance of "aligning their outgoing/graduating students with the businesses of their region and the state of ND" I have learned that when we achieve this alignment that the state and community are more likely to retain these aligned students in ND and hopefully in the local community/region they grew up in. Consequently, local & regional businesses get the critical skilled workers they need, and they are more likely to grow and prosper.

During this time, I have found that the Career Builders Scholarship and Student Loan repayment program has been the single best tool / financial incentive to help make these student/business connections possible. For that reason, I ask that you provide the funding and changes requested for this program as requested in SB2272. By matching business donated dollars, the incentive is created for the businesses to start their recruiting process much earlier than normal business hiring and we can keep our local graduating youth local, versus losing them to competing companies from out of state.

When this happens local communities like Devils Lake win and the state of ND wins as well.

One example of a successful "Alignment" of a regional youth with a local company is Alex Lowery of Langdon, ND. Alex was a successful student in Langdon, Captain of a State Champion Football team and he wanted to get started in a career by attending a local affordable college. With the help of the Career Builders Scholarship, we were able to match up Alex with Marketplace Ford of Devils Lake they agreed to sponsor Alex with a Careers Builders Scholarship and Alex was accepted into Lake Region State College 2 years ago.

Alex will be graduating in May of this year. His part time after school job at Marketplace Ford will turn into a career as an Automotive Technician. The result is a regional HS student stayed in our region, his college tuition bill was reduced significantly, and he and his family are not deep in student/parent loan debt. The Devils Lake region keeps one of their own youth working and thriving and hopefully beginning a new family in the next few years.

Alex Lowery with Chris Devier former Service Mgr. of Marketplace Ford, Devils Lake

In conclusion, Economic Development in rural areas like Devils Lake is difficult - but programs like the Career Builder Scholarship and Student Loan Repayment program give rural cities and towns the capability to put scholarship and student loan packages together that entice and encourage our local graduating youth to go to a ND school for two years and come back to Devils Lake in a highly successful role for the community. Please fully fund and renew the Career Builder Scholarship and Student Loan Repayment program and support SB 2272.

Thank you for your support.

Brad Barth

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