



**Senate Appropriations Committee**

**SB 2004**

**January 14, 2021**

Chairman Holmberg and Committee Members, I am Courtney Koebele, Executive Director for the ND Medical Association. The North Dakota Medical Association is the professional membership organization for North Dakota physicians, residents, and medical students.

NDMA is a strong supporter of the North Dakota Student Loan Repayment Program (LRP). As you know, the North Dakota State Legislature established the first Health Care Professional Student Loan Repayment Program in 1992 to recruit and retain providers in rural and defined health shortage areas. It is an excellent way to have physicians come to the state and serve in areas with a defined need.

Physicians enter into five-year contracts, which allows time for the physician to become invested, engaged and committed to working and living in rural and underserved communities. According to the data compiled by the LRP, 56 physicians (66%) from 1993-2020 who completed loan repayment contracts have remained in ND.

The state needs to continue this program to support our healthcare workforce. As of June 2020, about 94% of counties in North Dakota are fully or partially designated as health professional shortage areas for primary care. Without continued funding for new slots to be awarded to physicians, there will not be any incentives to offer in recruiting physicians in our rural and defined health professional shortage areas and physician shortages will remain in underserved areas.

We support the loan repayment program and would urge you to include the OAR in the Health Department's budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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