



**Testimony of Jennifer Greuel
Economic Development Association of North Dakota
In Support of SB 2019
January 7, 2021**

Chairman Holmberg and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee:

I am Jennifer Greuel, executive director of the Economic Development Association of North Dakota (EDND). On behalf of EDND, I write to you in support of SB 2019.

EDND represents more than 80 state economic development organizations and related businesses on the front line of economic development efforts throughout North Dakota. The primary purpose of the organization is to promote the creation of new wealth throughout North Dakota to develop more vibrant communities and improve quality of life.

Although North Dakota's unemployment rate has gone up slightly due to the pandemic (4.5 percent in Nov. 2020), workforce availability is still a significant challenge facing North Dakota businesses, limiting the growth potential of the state's economy. EDND supports the development of workforce attraction, development and retention strategies that address the needs of the state's businesses and industries.

North Dakota is especially in need of skilled, trained workers, which the Department of Career and Technical Education (CTE) helps provide and equip. Information technology (IT) professionals, welders, CDL drivers, diesel technicians, electricians, and HVAC technicians, for example, are all desperately needed in most communities across the state and are areas in which CTE provides training. Workforce development is integral in creating a diversified economy and creating better employees and competitive companies. The training programs provided by CTE are tailored to the needs of businesses and provide tools for more efficient and productive employees.

TrainND is a CTE program providing critical support and training for businesses and employees across the state. Through collaboration between state, business and education systems, comprehensive and customized employee training is created to address critical workforce shortages. EDND supports the agency's request to restore funding back to \$2 million, as this viable program brings business, higher education and employees together.

EDND also supports the Executive Budget Recommendation of \$45 million for the building of career and technical education centers throughout the state, as well as subsequent needed funding for ongoing operations. An investment in the skillset of people in North Dakota is an investment in the state's future economy and programs which target youth and encourage students to consider in-demand, technical degree career paths to which they might not otherwise be exposed.

The availability of a high-quality competitive workforce will continue to be a significant challenge facing North Dakota businesses. Even though, due to the pandemic, there are more people looking for jobs, North Dakota does not have enough skilled workers to fill in-demand and technical job openings. EDND supports the investments included in this bill and the development of workforce training strategies that address the diversification and growth of businesses and employees.

Thank you for this opportunity to address your committee and express our support of SB 2019.