



THE CHAMBER FARGO MOORHEAD WEST FARGO

FMWF Chamber Support for HB 1018

January 9th, 2023

Chairman Nathe and members of the House Appropriations - Education and Environment Division Committee:

For the record, my name is Katherine Grindberg and I have the pleasure of serving as the Executive Vice President for the Fargo Moorhead West Fargo (FMWF) Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber's mission is to be a catalyst for economic growth and prosperity for businesses, members, and the greater community. Today, on behalf of our over 1,900 members, I offer testimony in support of House Bill 1018 along with a suggestion.

As members of this committee well know, workforce is a major challenge facing nearly every business across North Dakota. This is the number one issue we hear from our businesses. This challenge is not unique to our state though, businesses across the United States are in desperate need of qualified workers to fill their open positions. Every state in the nation is competing to attract, acclimate, retain, and develop workforce. According to the latest federal Job Openings and Labor Report, the national average was nearly 1.9 job openings per available worker. In December, a U.S. Chamber study categorized North Dakota in the “most severe” workforce shortage category with 2.2 job openings per available worker.

North Dakota must remain committed to identifying creative and multi-pronged solutions to addressing this shortage. For example, during the 2021 Special Session, the 67th Legislative Assembly provided a \$15 million appropriation to the Department of Commerce to establish a Regional Workforce Impact Program (RWIP) in SB 2345 for the “purpose of adding or expanding a local workforce development incentive grant program to recruit, retain, and retain workers”. Under this innovative program, organizations, like the FMWF Chamber Foundation, will be able to establish and further expand regional workforce programs to address the specific needs of our community.

Through creative and regional-based solutions, like the RWIP program, communities can assist North Dakota businesses with the acclimation, retention, and development of qualified workers, while helping job seekers prepare for and connect to high-quality and good-paying jobs here in our state. The FMWF Chamber supports the continued investment into the RWIP program and would ask the legislature to keep this program sustainable, so our state can remain competitive in a global marketplace.

The Chamber believes the state should continue to invest in state-based workforce programs and we applaud the Workforce Development Council and the Department of Commerce for their leadership in expressing the need for workforce attraction in North Dakota. We recognize the desire to have a uniform voice when it comes to talent attraction, but the reality is that jobs in West Fargo are different from those in Williston. We know talent attraction looks vastly different across our communities. From Minot to Minto, Fargo to Fessenden, and every city or township in between, each community is presented with unique opportunities and challenges regarding workforce attraction. A one size fits all strategy doesn't capitalize on the unique needs of each community.

The FMWF Chamber respectfully suggests that a significant portion of the proposed attraction funding be dedicated to grants for each of the 8 planning regions. Every community has a different and unique story that its' community and business leaders underscore when attracting workforce from across the nation and the world.

Finally, as we discuss workforce attraction, I would be remised to not emphasize the importance of quality-of-life assets and placemaking infrastructure to enhance the State's attraction and retention efforts. As many business owners know, employees are in the driver's seat, and now, more than ever, they are prioritizing quality-of-life assets and placemaking infrastructure when considering employment. We support strategic efforts to energize our communities, like the proposed Destination Development Fund, which helps attract new residents and retain youth and the existing workforce.

On behalf of our members, I would like to thank the committee for their time and consideration this morning.

Respectfully,

Katherine Grindberg

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