



January 16, 2023

Members of the North Dakota
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
RE: Support for HB1199

Chairperson Vigessaa and members of the House Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB1199. My name is Denise Jonas, Director of Career and Technical Education for the Cass County Career and Technical Education Center (C3TEC), supporting career and technical education (CTE) programs in Central Cass, Fargo, Northern Cass, and West Fargo Public Schools.

During the North Dakota - 67th Legislative Assembly, leaders committed to a state-wide vision for area career and technical education centers under HB1015 – Section 6. The goal, expand learner access to CTE for communities across the state. The strategy, Federal Coronavirus Capital grant funds. Unfortunately, these federal funds have not been released, thus delaying most capital projects and program delivery in all communities. Delays are now contributing to increased project expenses and program cuts due to material costs, labor increases, and growing inflation.

We ask for your support now in the 2023 - 68th Legislative Assembly to approve HB1199 to avoid further delays and expenses for these already approved projects. Investing in area career and technical education is not only a vision for learners but a legacy for North Dakota education and workforce development.

In Cass County, collaborative discussions around the potential for an area career and technical education center began in 2016. The vision to create a systemic career education network through public, private, and business partnerships was sparked by the collective insight of C3TEC school districts, NDSCS, and the NDSCS Alumni Foundation. This expanded to partnership discussions with business and industry, the cities of Fargo and West Fargo, the Cass County Commission, FM Economic Development, FMWF Chamber of Commerce, and local legislators. The wheels were in motion and driven to improve K-14 career education and exploration experiences, while aligning college preparation and partnership strategies for stronger recruitment and retention of future students and employees in the community and state.

Over the past six years, our concerted efforts have moved this vision forward through strategic action, stakeholder input, and fundraising. The timeline below depicts the journey and on-going commitment by stakeholders to see this project to fruition. From this focused work, the Career Innovation Center (CIC) was born and launched.

- 2017-2018 Phase I: Stakeholder input sessions and CIC Strategic Plan completed
- 2018-2019 Phase II: K-14 Program Priorities and Curriculum audit completed to identify program areas
- 2019-2020 Operations: strategic discussions related to fundraising, operational budget, governance, agreements
- 2020-2021 Phase III: architecture selection, design, instructor input, renderings, preliminary material bids, etc.
- July 2021 Groundbreaking: Project Construction - Step 1
- 2021-2022 Federal Coronavirus grant application and project approval to support Step 2
- 2021-2022 Construction delays due to federal funding, project guidance, and supply chain disruptions
- 2022-2023 Legislative advocacy to federal leaders for funds and ND leaders for emergency action

The CIC project is a unique, multi-pronged collaborative approach between the C3TEC school districts, a post-secondary institution, a foundation, municipalities, and industry. Support for HB1199 would expand flexibility for this unique project and accelerate delayed construction.

Cass County currently enrolls 22-25% of North Dakota's K-12 student population. We have a desire to innovate and expand career exploration while creating strong post-secondary connections. As one of the fastest growing regions in North Dakota, workforce is also at the forefront of economic development, thus business partnerships make sense for relevance. As a community, the CIC is one strategy in our collaborative network to expand career exploration, align curriculums, and centralize workforce training.

The CIC, along with twelve approved area career and technical education projects have met, and still meet, the intent and vision of HB1015 – Section 6, yet are at a relative standstill with federal funding delays and policy requirements. We thank you for your “DO PASS” vote on HB1199 with the proposed amendment.

Sincerely,

Denise D. Jonas

Dr. Denise D. Jonas,
Cass County Director of Career and Technical Education

Cc:

Patti Stedman, C3TEC Governance Board President
Penny Johnson, C3TEC Governance Board
Seth Holden, C3TEC Governance Board
Katie Christensen, C3TEC Governance Board
Nikki Gullickson, C3TEC Governance Board
Todd Sears, C3TEC Governance Board
Joe Morken, C3TEC Governance Board
Morgan Forness, Central Cass Superintendent
Dr. Rupak Gandhi, Fargo Superintendent
Dr. Bob Grosz, Fargo Associate Superintendent
Dr. Cory Steiner, Northern Cass Superintendent
Beth Slette, West Fargo Superintendent
Vincent Williams, West Fargo Assistant Superintendent
Pam Utt, Central Cass Business Manager
Jackie Gapp, Fargo Business Manager
Paige Carlson, Northern Cass Business Manager
Levi Bachmeier, West Fargo Business Manager