



Letter of Support – HB 1199

January 18th, 2023

Chairman Vigesaa and members of the House Appropriations Committee:

For the record, my name is Bernie Dardis and I have the pleasure of serving as Mayor of the City of West Fargo. I respectfully offer testimony in support of House Bill 1199, with the friendly amendment, and ask that the legislature expedite this much-needed funding for our career and technical education centers.

As you may know, West Fargo is one of the fastest-growing cities in the state of North Dakota. Just in 2021, the City of West Fargo's manufacturing industry increased by 400 jobs or 20%. In order to sustain this tremendous growth, we must continue to attract, retain, and develop skilled workers to fill the thousands of open jobs that exist within our city, region, and state. This project brings together local school districts and North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) to serve nearly 3,000 K-12, college, and workforce training students.

Creative workforce solutions, like the Cass County Career Innovation Center is truly a collaborative effort amongst our whole community to tackle this workforce crisis. Almost 10 years ago, community and educational leaders recognized the future demand for workforce and began crafting solutions to address this crisis. Since its inception, the Career Innovation Center has received incredible support from our community, establishing strong public and private partners including: NDSCS, four Cass County K-12 school districts, FM Home Builders Association, the NDSCS Alumni Foundation, the Cities of West Fargo and Fargo, Cass County, the FMWF Chamber, Economic Development Corporation, and numerous private businesses.

Local government entities, such as Cass County, the City of West Fargo, and the City of Fargo, have all stepped up to financially support the project, as it holistically addresses the unmet training demands of our entire region. We were thankful that during the special session of the legislative assembly, the state also allocated funds to academies across the state to support state-of-the-art education and training experiences, chipping away at our region's workforce demands. We are thankful to the Legislative Leaders for introducing this bill so that we can utilize the allocated funds in a timely manner, avoiding additional inflationary costs beyond what we've incurred.

In addition to unlocking these funds, Representative Swiontek's friendly amendment allows for foundations, such as the NDSCS Foundation, to be the recipient of these much-needed funds to move our project forward. We believe the NDSCS Foundation is well-positioned to lead the construction of this project as they have owned the building that has been providing CTE instruction to high school students in our region since 1997. From the very beginning, our community has utilized a collaborative approach, engaging the private sector, local governments, school districts, and NDSCS and its foundation. This amendment would simply allow our region's project, as well as others with this collaborative model, to proceed as planned and bring meaningful programming to students.

Mr. Chair and members of this committee, I would like to thank you for your time and consideration this morning. I respectfully ask that HB 1199 be expedited through the legislative process to provide this much-needed funding to our career and technical education centers across the state.

Respectfully,

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