

HB 1199
Chairman Vigesaa
House Appropriations Committee
January 18th, 2023

Good morning. Chairman Vigesaa and members of the House Appropriations Committee, for the record, my name is Steven Holen and I am superintendent of schools for the McKenzie County Public School District #1 in Watford City and the forthcoming Bakken Area Skills Center. I am here to testify in support of HB 1199 and its appropriation to allow for the grant funded allocations promised to school districts pursuing Career and Technical Education centers in North Dakota be fulfilled and allow for construction to be initiated and completed as intended.

The need for additional Career and Technical Education centers in our state was clearly defined and articulated with the grant allocation provided by the 2021 Legislative Assembly. The pursuit of workforce readiness and enhanced collaboration with our major industry partners and post-secondary institutions is the vision for most Centers and is certainly the mission of the Bakken Area Skills Center which was approved and allocated grant funds by the State Career and Technical Education Board in 2022. Delays in getting these Centers completed is counterproductive to the purposes envisioned and the immediate needs in our communities and regions. The workforce needs of our state correlated to the opportunities provided by the new Centers requires immediate attention and ultimately impact the economic success of our state and its taxpayers. The line of credit offered in HB 1199 will allow for the Centers to be completed as intended and begin to serve their purpose in the identified areas of need.

The delays in construction related to the uncertainty and unavailability of grant funds for awarded school districts have come at a cost to the grantees. The inflationary costs associated with construction are substantial and have brought reductions in scope and scale of projects to maintain construction budgets. Reductions in scale or other cost saving measures risk limiting the impact and scale of which these initial grants were submitted and awarded. It is imperative the grant funding allocations be made available immediately to ensure the returns on the investment with grant funding are as high as possible and avoid any further inflationary factors with construction delays.

The grant funding provided to add Career and Technical Centers to areas underserved with these services in our state was highly valued and impactful to the statewide mission of Career and Technical Education and workforce preparedness. The passage of HB 1199 will simply ensure those intentions are fulfilled and the areas selected for new Centers can utilize these necessary services as soon as possible. With funding challenges assumed with construction costs and typical school budgets, it is imperative the grant funds allocated are available as needed and to avoid any further issues with construction delays and assumed inflationary costs due to those delays.

Thank you for your support of HB 1199 and its importance to our school district and communities served by the new Career and Technical Education centers.