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Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to speak in front of the committee today on SB 2145. My name is Blaine Booher and I am the Program Director of Emerging Digital Academy (“EDA”), which is an immersive 20-week career training program that teaches students the skills necessary to gain access to entry level software engineering jobs in North Dakota. I’m joined today by my colleague Matt Wendel.

Since beginning operation in late 2019, EDA has graduated 55 students over 8 cohorts. Our students have achieved a successful outcome rate of over 90% within 6 months of graduation. The median starting salary for full-time jobs after graduation is \$52k which is an average increase of over 200% compared to income prior to enrolling.

Our students by and large find opportunity in North Dakota, working for local technology teams at companies such as Scheels, Bushel, Perficient, Microsoft, Signum, Project Phoenix, Codelation, Cota Logistics, Heat Transfer Warehouse, 701x, and more.

I am here today to testify in support of SB 2145 which seeks to fix a constraint in current law relating to the requirements needed to achieve a licensure for authorized operation as a private career school in North Dakota.

Under current statute, software coding bootcamps, such as EDA, are overseen by the North Dakota Department of Career and Technical Education (“CTE”). In order for these programs to graduate from a temporary provisional license to a full license to operate, a program needs to meet all requirements set by CTE including accreditation.

Accreditation is extremely difficult and unclear for this type of program. Out of the dozens of software coding bootcamps in the country only one similar program has achieved accreditation. It is unclear if most coding software bootcamps would even qualify for this type of accreditation due to the non-traditional structure and continually updating curriculum

Accreditation, if possible, will take significant time and resources, and would require the freezing of curriculum development during the process. The ability to tailor curriculum quickly to industry needs is one of the main benefits of such programs. The nature of this program is hands-on technical training with direct feedback from industry and as such the curriculum is not based around progress towards a specific degree or college credits.

We have been working in cooperation with the CTE board since the first Authorization to Operate A Private Career School application was submitted by our team in January 2020. Over



the past 3 years, we have successfully gained provisional licensure status each year, and worked in good faith with the CTE board to understand the constraints and exemptions from the accreditation requirement in the NDCC.

While we have had ongoing discussion during each annual renewal cycle with the CTE board about this requirement, we began looking to implement a fix in the North Dakota Century Code in fall 2021. In Spring 2022 we explored the current law to understand if the existing language allowed for accreditation exemptions but after working with the CTE board it was determined that an update to NDCC was the best course of action.

EDA currently operates with a provisional license to operate which is authorized by CTE, which is intended as a temporary approval for new programs. Obtaining a full license to operate will provide clarity and certainty for the program. Achieving a full license to operate is the ultimate goal of career training programs licensed by CTE to operate in the State of North Dakota.

There are several state systems that require licensure to operate such as the Bank of North Dakota, Career Builders, and Job Services as well as several federal programs such as veteran skill training opportunities. Achieving full licensure beyond provisional status is the ultimate goal to ensure that EDA is maintaining the highest standards of quality and can continue to work with these various systems and programs at the state and federal level long term.

SB 2145 adds an additional condition for exemption to the section that requires accreditation to move from provisional to full operating license. This exemption will allow EDA to operate under a full license as authorized by the CTE board.

We would like to extend gratitude to Senator Davison and Wayde Sick and the entire CTE Board for their work on the bill, the updated amendment, and the collaboration with Emerging Digital Academy. We support the bill and amendment and look forward to our continued work together.

