



THE CHAMBER
FARGO MOORHEAD WEST FARGO

FMWF Chamber Letter of Support for SB 2142

March 13th, 2023

Chair Headland and members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee,

For the record, my name is Shannon Full, and I have the pleasure of serving as the President and CEO of 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. On behalf of our over 1,900 members, I respectfully offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 2142, with a request.

As you know, every state across the United States is competing to attract, develop, and retain workforce, hoping to fill thousands of open jobs. According to the latest federal Job Openings and Labor Report, the national average was nearly 1.9 job openings per available worker. In December of 2022, a U.S. Chamber study categorized North Dakota in the “most severe” workforce shortage category with 2.2 job openings per available worker. These statistics go to show that much of this workforce shortage is a numbers issue, we simply do not have enough capable individuals to fill the number of open jobs. Our state must effectively compete on a global scale for workforce to fill our thousands of open jobs. To do this, both the public and private sectors must work together to identify creative, innovative, and multi-pronged solutions. We believe legal immigration and refugee resettlement are pivotal to addressing this crisis and are one of the prongs that are part of a comprehensive solution.

Many of our business and industry leaders throughout our region have shared their desire to look beyond our nation’s borders to fill their open jobs but are all too often faced with several challenges. For example, many businesses do not have immigration experts on staff, nor do they have access to the necessary information, resources, and legal services in their communities to assist in the hiring of immigrants or refugees. Due to this lack of resources, The FMWF Chamber and many other organizations throughout the state of North Dakota have asked for the establishment of an Office of Immigration to provide businesses with the much-needed resources to attract, retain, and develop talent from across the globe. It is critical that these services be strategically placed throughout our state to ensure accessibility in regions with high workforce needs.

Additionally, I must emphasize the importance of not only the attraction of workforce but also the retention and development of these individuals. When these individuals move to North Dakota we must also focus our attention on retention strategies, to ensure these folks are properly acclimated and become well-rooted in our communities. As it relates to development, many of these individuals from outside the US possess several skills or a strong desire to develop a new set of skills. Whether it be through post-secondary, credentialing, or on-the-job training, we must ensure we are equipping these individuals with skills to best prepare them for their future careers.

Lastly, as the legislature is considering the establishment of this office, I respectfully ask that the total number of authorized full-time employees be increased to 3 FTEs. Simply put, one person could not fulfill the varying immigration needs across the state in a practical manner. Sustainable staffing levels ensure that the Department of Commerce can effectively and efficiently meet the unique business needs that exist across the State of North Dakota, as it relates to immigration. I would also recommend that those FTEs be strategically located throughout the state to ensure high availability of access to these individuals by the businesses that most need their assistance.

The workforce crisis our country is facing is complex and cannot be solved unilaterally. It is cyclical in nature and requires a great deal of creativity and innovation. Our state has the opportunity to lead the nation by establishing a strategic path forward that addresses the challenges faced by businesses and communities, as it relates to immigration and refugee resettlement. On behalf of our members, I would like to thank the committee for their time and consideration this morning. I will now stand for any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shannon Full". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Shannon" and the last name "Full" clearly legible.

Shannon Full
President/CEO
FMWF Chamber of Commerce
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