

House Finance and Taxation Committee

SB 2344

March 7, 2023

Chairperson Headland and Members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee:

I am providing testimony in support of SB 2344 which would include a public health loan repayment in the North Dakota State healthcare workforce loan repayment program.

I am the administrator at Custer Health, the local public health unit that covers Grant, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, and Sioux Counties. We employ a variety of public health professionals such as environmental health practitioners, dietitians, nurses, tobacco prevention specialists, and administrative support staff. As the administrator, I have witnessed firsthand the difficulty in recruiting professionals in the field of public health. Public health is vital to the healthcare structure of North Dakota and the landscape of public health's role in North Dakota is continuously evolving. It is crucial that there be a strong and willing workforce to support this structure in the future.

A loan repayment program would show North Dakota's investment in public health and acknowledge its importance in our state. I graduated with my Master's in Public Health from North Dakota State University in 2013 and went directly into the field of local public health. I know firsthand the burden of student loan debt and the challenge repayment has been. A public health job in the public sector has considerably lower wages than that of the private sector. A loan repayment program would help encourage new graduates to enter the field of public health in North Dakota. We need to focus on strengthening our public health infrastructure and an investment has to be made in our up-and-coming professionals to accomplish it.

I respectfully urge you to support SB 2344 to strengthen the public health system in North Dakota and thus create a healthier state for all of us.

Sincerely,

Erin Ourada
403 Burlington St SE
Mandan, ND 58554
701-667-3370