

**Testimony on
Senate Bill 2344
House Finance and Taxation Committee
March 7, 2023
Sherry Adams, Southwestern District Health Unit**

Good morning, Chairman Headland and members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee. My name is Sherry Adams and I am the Executive Officer for Southwestern District Health Unit (SWDHU). My health unit covers the eight counties of the Southwest which includes Adams, Billings, Golden Valley, Bowman, Slope, Dunn, Hettinger and Stark. I am in support of Senate Bill 2344 which provides student loan repayment for public health professionals.

The North Dakota State Association of City and County Health Officials (NDSACCHO), which I currently chair, has had numerous discussions especially over the past few years about hiring struggles we face in local public health. Although we are creative in what we can offer as incentives to work with us, we are in competition with many other entities – many are private companies – for a limited pool of personnel. I've included a Local Public Health Workforce Survey Executive Summary for your review.

As Chair of the State Health Council, we have also had several discussions regarding the hiring challenges we face. It should be noted that public health covers many different areas in addition to nursing services. Our professional needs are the same as for-profit businesses, e.g., finances, marketing, scheduling, etc., and therefore feel it's necessary to refer to "professional" in broad terms.

Public health has been woefully underfunded for several years. Loan repayment funding through the State program would greatly help entice students to pursue careers in public health and thereby assist our communities.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my comments and ask your favorable consideration for this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.