



SB 2344

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Chair Lee and Members of the Committee: My name is Connor Ferguson, and I am the Director of Policy, Advocacy, and Research for the North Dakota Student Association (NDSA). I am testifying today on behalf of the NDSA in support of SB 2344.

The North Dakota Student Association is a student organization established in 1969 dedicated to ensuring that students have a voice at the table in policy that affects Higher Education. We consist of delegates from each of the 11 public institutions meeting monthly to engage students in ND Higher Education policy. Our mission is to empower students, create collaboration between the student bodies of the North Dakota public universities, and to give a student perspective on higher education policy.

On November 5th, 2022 the NDSA passed the resolution NDSA-09-2223: A Resolution in Support of the NDSA's Legislative Priorities for the 23-25 Biennium. One of the priorities enumerated by the resolution is the increase of access to financial aid for NDUS students. The North Dakota Student Association also passed NDSA-08-2223: A Resolution in Support of NDUS Scholarships, which emphasizes the importance of scholarships for NDUS students. We believe that scholarships are essential for many students to access a quality education concern of severe financial burden. Finally, the NDSA passed NDSA-12-2223: A Resolution in Support of HB 1003: Higher Education Budget Allocation for the 23-25 Biennium on Saturday, January 21st, 2023. In this resolution, the NDSA discussed the importance of affordable education for retention of skilled workers and need to attract workers in high demand jobs.

The passage of HB 2344 will significantly increase the financial well-being of healthcare professionals by alleviating much of their outstanding student loan debt. If passed, this bill will work to attract high-demand healthcare workers to the state of North Dakota. Offering student loan repayment in ND will create a very appealing alternative for those considering working in another state. In turn, this will make employment in North Dakota very competitive and will likely attract high quality healthcare workers who may stay in the state for much of their lives. These graduates will work in flourishing and productive industries which have high demand for intelligent, new workers. It is important that the state of North Dakota leverages this population and attracts new healthcare workers to the state for sustainable economic development. The repayment plan funded by SB 2344 is an investment in the next generation of North Dakotans that will pay off for years to come.

The NDSA also believes that retention of students is essential. This bill will work to keep graduates of North Dakota's medical school and various healthcare programs in the state after graduation. By offering more opportunities for success to those concerned by the severe economic burden, the state will be successful in maintaining the students it has already invested in. As students, we are interested in ensuring that recent graduates have access to the greatest opportunity for success. By offering repayment plans to healthcare workers in the state, North Dakota will offer significant opportunities to students already in high demand. On behalf of the North Dakota Student Association and students across the NDUS, I urge the committee to provide a Do Pass recommendation on HB 1451.