

March 9, 2023

Testimony of Ms. Becca Cruger

Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation

Director of Workforce Development

House Bill 1018

Senator Bekkedahl and members of the Appropriations Committee,

I have served as the Director of Workforce Development for the Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation for the past six years and have worked directly with industry who are impacted daily by labor shortages across our great state.

Today, I am asking you to support House Bill 1018 and specifically am writing to ask you to increase the support for talent attraction funding. This is crucial to the future success of being able to retain current businesses and recruit new industry to our state.

In the work that I do, I often hear the refrain, "Nobody wants to work anymore." And that simply isn't true in North Dakota. The challenge, frankly, is that we do not have the number of people who live here to fill the open positions. Numbers do not lie. In Grand Forks County alone we currently have 1,459 published job openings on the ND Job Service website. If you look at the number of people unemployed, there are 714. **Even if every single person took a job tomorrow, we would still have .47 of a person for every open job.** Half of a person for every open job.

This isn't just limited to Grand Forks County. If you look at statewide numbers, we currently have 17,111 open jobs with just 8,347 collecting unemployment. Again, that's half of a person for every open job. The problem isn't that nobody wants to work anymore, the problem is that our state simply does not have enough people to work.

You as state leaders have done an exceptional job of supporting programs like Operation Intern and Career Builders that help keep North Dakotans in North Dakota. But the only solution to our population problem is to begin an aggressive tactic and become a leader in recruiting people from outside of our state.

What the Workforce Division at the Department of Commerce is proposing to do with the talent attraction funding should be lauded and applauded for the novel approach that it is. We need to be innovative and competitive in the national war on talent and the Workforce Division has decisively put together a pilot program that is well thought through, intentional, involves expert organizations, and – most importantly – includes trackable metrics to ensure taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely.

Even more, they've built out a statewide network of community champions who are thinking about how to make their talent attraction initiatives strong enough to partner with Commerce's. From East to West, Commerce has empowered community champions to take workforce attraction seriously.

As you are making decisions today, I know you are thinking about our state's future. At Grand Forks Economic Development Corporation, we often host site selectors who are evaluating our state and region for business opportunity. I can tell you that on the last two large visits, we spent an entire day talking with site selection teams about labor.

If we don't continue to take action and be bold when it comes to talent attraction, we will fall behind and lose out on future industry growth. I implore you to support the talent attraction funding.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Becca Cruger".

Becca Cruger, Director of Workforce Development
Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation