

SB 2240 – Letter of Support
Senate Appropriations Committee
01/23/2023

Chair Bekkedahl and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee,

For the record, our names are Steve Blazek and Shawn Dobberstein, and we have the privilege of serving as co-chairs for Fargo’s National Guard Support Group (NGSG). On behalf of our support group, we respectfully offer testimony in support of SB 2240.

The Fargo NGSg was established in 2004 and is made up of business leaders, active military personnel, and two retired Adjutant Generals. We’re honored to serve as an advocate and support arm for our local National Guard units. With over a third of the statewide economic impact of the North Dakota National Guard, the continued success of our local guard units is imperative for not only our community but the state.

We commend the legislature for recognizing our military’s contributions to our state and individual communities and for the state’s previous investments in our region’s continued success. Our community support group has intentionally collaborated with partners in Grand Forks and Minot, maximizing the impact of our efforts. The relationship between our three support groups has never been stronger than it is today. With joint meetings between leadership, community visits, and partnership on advocacy events, we have maintained a strong alliance.

Our region has strategically identified three areas in which state funding and support would provide meaningful impact: Advocacy and Awareness, Advancement of Personnel Recruitment, and Community-Based Programming and Support. We believe one of the greatest assets of our support group is the ability to host strategic meetings and engagements with key federal and military officials to maintain and bolster national awareness and demonstrate community military support. This past year, we partnered with our Minot and Grand Forks counterparts to host a North Dakota Guard Reception in Washington D.C. The event was well attended and included leadership from each community, North Dakota Congressional Delegates, various federal National Guard leadership members, and other key stakeholders. While in our Nation’s Capital, our delegation of community advocates met with all three North Dakota Congressional Delegates, National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS) President Brig. Gen. Roy Robinson, Director of the Army National Guard, Lt. Gen. Jon Jensen, and many others. Many of our conversations centered around gratitude for their support of the North Dakota National Guard, highlighting the need for permanent assignment of MQ-9 Block 5 aircraft and reinstatement of Air National Guard Federal Tuition Assistance.

Additionally, our community support for personnel recruitment is critical to the end strength of the National Guard. As it relates to the Air National Guard, there has been a pause in federal recruitment dollars. The NGSg has been crucial in driving interested candidates to recruiters through various campaigns.

On behalf of our Fargo NGSg, we respectfully ask for the reinstatement of the Base Retention Grant Program and the appropriation of \$1.9 million. SB 2240 further supports the collaborative work of Fargo, Grand Forks, and Minot to support North Dakota’s military missions and personnel. North Dakota has always demonstrated strong support for those who serve, and we are extremely grateful for the support of previous legislative assemblies and their commitment to this program. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Steve Blazek & Shawn Dobberstein
Co-Chairs
Fargo National Guard Support Group