

SB 2197
Chairman Elkin
Senate Education Committee
January 18th, 2023

Good morning. Chairman Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee, for the record, my name is Steven Holen and I am superintendent of schools for the McKenzie County Public School District #1 in Watford City and the forthcoming Bakken Area Skills Center. I am here to testify in support of SB 2197 and its appropriation to provide scholarships directed to recruiting and retaining necessary workforce within the oil and gas industry in North Dakota.

The McKenzie County Public School District #1 has collaborated with our local political subdivisions and oil and gas industry partners for several years to address workforce related needs and the importance of providing the necessary training and education to recruit and retain the necessary workforce to ensure oil and gas development in North Dakota is maintained and grown over the next decades and its value to the entire state of North Dakota. The ability to provide the necessary training and education for not only the actual energy industry, but also all related supporting industries and infrastructure to support ongoing population growth and necessary services in our region. The ability to recruit and retain a highly qualified workforce is essential to the oil and gas industry and to the economic capacity of North Dakota into the foreseeable future. The Re-energize scholarships will assist in providing these opportunities to meet the needs of our Industry partners and our general communities.

The Bakken Area Skills Center was developed to help address workforce needs in our region and provide ongoing, high quality training and education to K-12 students, post-secondary students, and adult workers desperately needed in our region. The Re-energize scholarships complement the efforts of the Bakken Area Skills Center and to help incentivize students or employees of all ages to pursue any levels of education or training to better themselves and to meet the needs of our major employers. The Bakken Area Skills Center is collaborating with our several post-secondary institutions under the control of the State Board of Higher Education to provide certifications, credentials, and degrees to meet the flexibility and convenience needed as the workers are required to be employed full-time while pursuing their additional education and training. The affordability of these trainings and the flexibility of the models provided are essential to the workforce needs of our oil and gas employers and partners. SB 2197 makes a substantial effort to address the affordability of these options regardless of the level of training or certification pursued.

The collaboration of government with bills such as SB 2197 and local education opportunities with K-12 and post-secondary are essential to address the current and ongoing challenges of workforce recruitment and retention. The opportunities available in oil and gas producing counties coupled with training and education incentives will assist to ensure prosperity for our local communities and statewide. Thank you for your support of SB 2197.