

Chairwoman Lee and members of the Senate Human Service Committee,

I write to provide written testimony in **SUPPORT** of SB 2344 to allow public health professionals to join our colleagues in health, dental, and behavioral health professions to access the state's health professional loan payment programming. I have worked in public health in North Dakota for the past five years, and prior to that as a paramedic for nearly three years. I have a Master's Degree in Public Health (MPH) from the University of North Dakota – a program established by legislative action in the early 2010s.

Entering the North Dakota public health workforce with an MPH left me in a challenging position, given the previous nursing centric public health model in North Dakota. In order to get a public health job, I was left accepting a position originally written for someone with an associate degree and accepting a pay cut from my previous paramedic position. Fortunately, I was able to bring my MPH education and background to elevate the position, and subsequently the salary of the position was brought to be commensurate with a professional degree.

An MPH is considered a professional degree instead of a graduate degree. This distinction is important, as it significantly increases the tuition costs for the degree. With an in-state, on campus tuition rate of \$948.83 per credit, MPH tuition is 45-50% higher than programs such as the master's in business administration, master's in counseling, master's in social work, and juris doctorate degrees at UND. These high rates leave many MPH graduates with a significant student loan burden compared to the initial salaries offered.

The combination of challenging initial job prospects combined with the high tuition and loan burden have left many of my colleagues looking out of state for employment. Student loan repayment programming may be one way to help retain vital public health workforce in-state. Over the past three years, we have seen the need for a robust public health workforce, and with that, I will **recommend a Do Pass on SB 2344**.

Thank you,

Michael Dulitz, MPH, NRP

A resident of District 17