

Testimony on SB 2142
Senate Industry and Business Committee
January 10, 2023

Good morning, Senator Larsen and members of the Senate Industry and Business Committee. My name is Bonnie Vangerud, Vice Chair of the North Dakota Organization of Nurse Leaders. NDONL represents both critical access as well as acute care hospitals across North Dakota. We are here to support SB 2142 which serves to create a healthcare Office of Immigration. We appreciate Senator Mathern as well as other bill co-sponsors in bringing this issue forward.

First, we are supportive of having the bill amended to reflect an Office of Immigration that serves all businesses in North Dakota, not just solely healthcare. Currently, there are numerous shortages of healthcare workers throughout the state ND. As a result hospitals, long-term care facilities, clinics, etc. are utilizing international staff to fill full-time positions.

SB 2142 has been drafted to create an Immigration office to help healthcare organizations throughout the state to:

- Recruit international staff
- Expedite the immigration process and placement
- Support international staff with financial, legal, and immigration-related applications, forms, or other communication in order to stay in ND

- Assist international staff with basic housing, food, and other essential services once they arrive in the state
- Develop a communication system for international staff to share community resources and assistance
- Develop a fee system to sustain the function of this office.

Vibra Hospital in Fargo, 68% of their registered nursing staff is international nurses. We wouldn't be able to care for our patients if not for them; so to the international nurses we are truly grateful! However, what I know is that it takes a long time for these staff to get to the United States and in their positions, for example I interviewed a nurse in early 2017 and she arrived in 2021. So I am envisioning this office to help expedite getting staff to ND sooner, quicker and faster.

I also know one of our nurses had to return to Africa in order to interview at the embassy so he could bring his family here. He left at the beginning of April and he has not returned to Fargo and we do not know when this will happen. So I am hopeful that this office would be able to help others like him be prepared with all the necessary paper work etc. so that it would be a smooth process. So he has been gone for 38 weeks, typically our staff work 3 – 12 hour shifts per week. So as a result we have had to find someone to cover approximately 1,368 hours, and each shift these staff care for approximately 5 patients or 570 patient days. Which is a lot to try and fill in a 31 bed hospital.

Now I would like to introduce you to Celestine Olale, she is a Registered Nurse from Kenya, Africa. She will share her journey to the United States and how this office could have positively impacted her.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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