From: Taya Spelhaug

Date: 3/9/2023

Subject: Support for HB 1232

Chair Wobbema and Members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee:

My name is Taya Spelhaug and I have been the TechSpark Manager for Microsoft's North Dakota initiatives since August 2017. TechSpark is a program that builds partnerships across sectors to understand the unique regional challenges and to explore solutions, programs, and partnerships that will be most effective at the local level. It is under this context that I am writing to encourage you to support passing of HB 1232.

Career awareness is one of the most important components in aligning students with appropriate career pathways. However, there is limited opportunity for students to have real on-site experiences due to time, geographic, financial, safety, liability, and privacy concerns. A lack of career awareness opportunities leaves our rural communities and our state as a whole struggling to retain our youth. There is an unfortunate perception that, in order to find a "good job," students need to leave their small towns or even leave the state entirely. Interactive media and virtual reality have huge potential to help solve this critical problem by providing students and career seekers of all ages with a first-person glimpse of high demand careers via interactive virtual experiences in industries including healthcare, technology, skilled trades, engineering, and more.

When strategically implemented, these experiences can be accessed 24/7 through both virtual reality headsets and on any standard internet connected device. We believe leveraging virtual reality to visualize authentic career pathways will demonstrate how technology intersects with jobs in every sector, promoting digital skills and employability, a key TechSpark initiative.

I have had the pleasure of both observing partnerships form and to help make connections between private companies, schools, and industry leaders through the development of a homegrown platform called CareerViewXR. Although this initiative is not directly affiliated with TechSpark, the effort has truly embodied the spirit of the TechSpark program. I was eager to nominate the CareerViewXR program for TechND's Premier Technology Business Award and was delighted when they were awarded the honor in the Fall of 2022.

North Dakota is full of innovation and to solve our rural workforce issues, we need to utilize cutting edge technology and CareerViewXR is just the tool to do so. Career awareness is one of the most fundamental areas that needs to be addressed. There has already been wonderful momentum building over the past 3 years through collaborative grassroots efforts using virtual reality an established and effective model that excites students, engages employers, and provides teachers with resources they desperately need.

I encourage you to support HB 1232 and take advantage of this unique and powerful opportunity for the state to have a positive impact on our rural students' knowledge of amazing career opportunities here in North Dakota.

Thank you for your time and consideration.