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Testimony of Dawn Mandt in support of Senate Bill 2151
to the Senate Workforce Development Committee
January 26, 2023

Senator Wobbema and members of the Committee on Workforce Development

My name is Dawn Mandt. I am grateful for the opportunity to **support Senate Bill 2151**. I am the Executive Director of Red River Regional Council in Region 4 – serving Grand Forks, Nelson, Pembina, and Walsh Counties related to economic and community development.

Over the past two years, our office conducted 130 one-on-one business interviews to listen, learn and develop a clear understanding of both their needs and opportunities. **We uncovered a dire need for workforce in the rural areas of our region that amounts to 1,500 new employees over the next five years. We also revealed that 90% of our companies have projected and planned growth. Workforce, childcare, and housing are our key barriers to enabling this growth.**

We initiated the NE Manufacturing Group several years ago to link the 20+ manufacturing and food processing plants in just Walsh and Pembina County whom employ 1,200 people. These companies include Harriston Industries, Kringstad Ironworks, Marvin, Woodside Industries, Bordertown Retail Systems, and more. These companies are vital to our economic health and vitality in northeastern North Dakota. In its 2020 Strategic Plan, the group **listed the need to cultivate new potential people to the region through the immigration and refugee channels. Without adequately tending to the specific needs of these economic drivers, we are beginning to lose ground.** Motor Coach Industries, a major commercial coach manufacturer, announced the relocation of its Pembina plant to Crookston, MN, in 2022. This will leave 200 employees and 209,000 sq ft manufacturing facility. This company has been in Pembina since 1963.

Just north of the border, Winkler, Manitoba is an excellent case study on the positive impact of targeted immigration. **Fifteen percent (15%) of the community's population is foreign-born with 1,832 immigrants settling in Winkler between 1999 and 2002.** With immigration has come inspiring entrepreneurial growth. This community is located just minutes from Walhalla, North Dakota which has experienced population loss since 1970.

I serve on the Board of Directors for CATCH. This organization initially caught my attention as part of the solution to the critical need for workforce in rural communities. Please support SB 2151.