

## Testimony for SB2151

Good morning Committee members and ND citizens:

My name is Marcia Patrie and I live north of Bismarck in Dist. 47. I am here to speak in favor of SB2151. I am a retired elementary teacher from Bismarck. I don't have technical or legal expertise in the area of immigration or with economic development but I do have many stories of lives made better by immigration to the United States.

I actually migrated to ND myself from Ohio in 1975, brought here after I married a homesick North Dakota guy. My experience with refugees starts when I was 8 or 9 years old when my parents rented a home to a family of 9 who had just arrived from Holland in the 60's. Their youngest child Debbie ( the most American name they knew )was born on the ship on their trip to the United States. The father, Jon Holtslag, told my folks that he was just a watch repairman but a few years later he moved to the DC area where he made parts for NASA. Our families were friends and we went to DC several times to visit them as I was growing up. They brought wonderful skills with them and even in the tiny town in Southwest Ohio population about 800 where I grew up they brought diversity and people found them interesting and fun to be with as we heard their story using a small paper back English/Dutch dictionary.

In 1975 after we had moved to the small community of Penn, ND I was hired in Devils Lake to work with Vietnamese children at the elementary public school and at the Catholic school to teach English. As a teacher I was always interested in their story and in awe. I saw people who had given up so much to come here with hopes of giving their children a better life.

Later, I was hired in Bismarck to work with ELL (English Language Learners) students in the 90's and served all 15 elementary schools for 4 years. I had many training opportunities during those years from a federal program known as Title VII. During my years in Bismarck, I worked with immigrant and refugee families through the school system. I **can't** tell you what the impact was that I had on them, but I can tell you my life and my families' lives were deeply enriched. We went to Naturalization ceremonies for one family who had come after the war in Bosnia-he had been a banker there and was driving a van for a nursing home here in Bismarck. Their son was in my son's wedding years later.

After my retirement I volunteered with LSS to help people learn some basic English, teach some people to drive, and offer a warm welcome to people who needed to make some connections here in our communities. During that time, I worked with a family who had come from Kenya but were originally from the Congo. They had seen more sadness than most of us can imagine. After 2 years they decided to move to Kentucky but their son who was a sophomore at Century didn't want to move in the middle of the year and I talked with his mom saying that he could probably stay with a friend and come to KY after school was out. Never intending that the friend would be us, but it was. He stayed that spring and we put him on a bus to Louisville in May but then, in August before school began I got a call and he was in Fargo wondering if he could come back. For 2 years he lived with us. We followed his soccer team as they won the ND championship in 2020. Not that all was smooth sailing as he was a teenager and we were in the grandparenting stage of life, and on top of that there was covid and distance learning. Now as I look back I see that time as a great experience that allowed me to have an impact on a human being and in return I was richly rewarded with friendships with African families and soccer folks we would have never met.

I see SB2151 as an opportunity to offer families who come here with an incentive to stay because we have something to offer them other states don't. But to also tell the committee that they have something to offer to the state as well. I think there would be families who I know that could have used this loan program to begin a new life here in our hometown communities.

Thank you for listening to me and for your work on this very positive bill that will have an impact, especially in our rural communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcia Patrie