

Draft: Testimony of Rev. Thomas Graner to the Senate Workforce Development Committee

Senate Bill 2151 January 26, 2023

Senator Wobbema and members of the Committee on Workforce Development

My name is Tom Graner. I am a life-long resident of North Dakota and a Catholic priest having served parishes in the north central part of the state since 1996 as a pastor and as rural life director for the Catholic Diocese of Fargo. I currently serve as pastor in Anamoose, Drake (District 6), and McClusky (District 14). I am also the president of the Board of Directors of CATCH, (Communities Acting Together for Change and Hope), a non-profit corporation registered with the North Dakota Secretary of State.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony in support of the Immigration Workforce Loan fund proposed for new residents of North Dakota in Senate Bill 2151.

At CATCH we have been discussing how we could involve rural communities in welcoming those who are in need of a new place to put down roots just as our families did 3 and 4 generations ago. In defining immigrant families as those who have lived in North Dakota for less than a year this bill opens the door for some of the North Dakota diaspora to return, Americans with no ties to North Dakota to establish themselves in our state, and those who have come here from beyond our nation's borders to follow in the footsteps of immigrant generations past.

I believe the assistance proposed in SB 2151 goes a long way to providing one of the missing links our communities would need to be successful in workforce development efforts – an incentive to choose to settle in North Dakota. Gone are the homestead acres that helped entice my ancestors to come here, but use of Legacy Fund dollars to support newcomers to North Dakota is a worthy cause. I believe this proposed assistance is the kind of American greatness and generosity (along the lines of the best of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln) that make our nation a model for the world and our state a model for the nation.

I know the community groups I've spoken to on behalf of CATCH (ministerial associations and a Lions Club) are aware there are challenges to welcoming new residents. I also sense their desire for new neighbors, to extend a helping hand and express their welcoming hearts. I hope the availability of these funds will motivate those in the process of resettling to take advantage of the capacity found in our rural churches, schools, workforces and general populations and as in earlier generations build on those capacities for a more vital future for all of North Dakota.

Attracting and retaining new families and resources for our communities and workforce will take more than money, but the ideas in SB 2151 move the ball forward. I encourage you to boldly support this bill.

Thank you for making this discussion a reality.

Attachment: Membership application for CATCH.