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**Testimony of Julie N Ramos Lagos in support of Senate Bill 2151  
to the Senate Workforce Development Committee**

To Senator Wobbema and members of the Committee on Workforce Development

I would like to submit this letter in support of Senate Bill 2151. My name is Julie N Ramos Lagos, currently the Executive Director for Bismarck Global Neighbors, a local non-profit that provides Refugee Support Services and programs that encourage successful integration of New Americans to Bismarck and Western ND. Just in the last six months, our organization has helped more than 100 refugees or humanitarian parolees new to ND settle into the Bismarck region and across Western ND. I am also an adjunct faculty at the University of Mary in Cultural Anthropology.

I am also originally from the small town of Tioga, ND and during the last oil boom in the Bakken, I was City Administrator for Tioga. It was during that time, that I saw the overall population increase 3x times within a year and our small town held 33% of all sales tax in ND during that time. Many small towns in the Bakken region saw rapid growth in infrastructure, workforce, housing, and educational initiatives at that time. Now many of those same towns have many empty housing units, finding barriers for childcare options, and a desperate need for employees. Many businesses have closed down for lack of staffing. Just a few months ago, the medical community in Tioga reached out to me to ask how they could bring refugees or international workers to their community to support their lack of nursing staff. This is only one of many small towns in ND that have reached out to me asking for assistance in this matter and wanting to be educated on the ways to bring New Americans to their small towns. Just in Bismarck alone, we know that Sanford has recently hired over 200 international nurses and St. A's over 400 international nurses to help their nursing workforce deficits. Many of your small towns across ND have

same concerns but do not always have the resources like your urban locations do and find additional assistance is needed for the New Americans coming to their communities.

I can tell you numerous success stories of New Americans that have come to ND this past year and are now vital to our economic growth and workforce. One family from Afghanistan that we helped to resettle this past summer recently had a baby, the husband is working in the HR department for Sanford and the mom is preparing to become a pilot for our community after maternity leave as she was the first woman pilot in her tribe in Afghanistan. There are also several New Americans that just completed their CDL trainings and are now supporting the trucking industry in ND. Others are supporting the workforce in childcare, nursing, manufacturing, farming, education, and more. These include both urban and rural areas in ND.

I have helped refugees or parolees resettle this past year in rural towns like Stanley, Wilton, Carrington, Burlington, and urban areas such as Dickinson, Minot, and Williston and many are supporting the workforce in those diverse communities.

As an affiliate of LIRS and holding contracts with the refugee state department to provide support to refugees in ND, I have found that it is also essential to have support from private businesses and organizations, churches, and schools along with state agencies in order to provide successful integration for a New American into a community. SB 2151 shifts some of the responsibility for recruiting workers to North Dakota from State Agencies and private businesses to communities. Especially in small towns where you have lack of resources for food pantries, English classes, transportation, childcare, and more. Transportation alone is a big challenge for New Americans who are not used to our harsh winters. New refugees often have no credit history due to getting their social security for the first time making it often difficult to get loans for mortgages or vehicles which can be a necessity for the workforce. SB 2151 can support the efforts of communities and individuals who need that funding during the first year to support their families. Majority of refugees currently coming to ND have family ties and individuals that have had that local support and are now bringing their families and friends to ND.

I believe SB2151 can be a part of the workforce solution for rural communities and can have a big impact on our state economy into the future. In the Bakken over the years, I have seen many individuals take early retirement and often you do not see the same growth of individuals under 35 in those communities who stay for the long term as many move to urban areas like Bismarck. This has caused many communities in ND to lack essential workers. Canada, our neighbor to the north experienced much of the same recently and took action this past year in bringing in over 430K of immigrants to their country in 2022 and plan to bring 1.5 million by 2025. They are seeing significant entrepreneurial and workforce growth in their communities due to this and ND has an opportunity to help bring similar successes with this bill.