



THE CHAMBER
FARGO MOORHEAD WEST FARGO

FMWF Chamber Letter of Support for SB 2151

Chair Wobbema and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee,

For the record, my name is Shannon Full, and I have the pleasure of serving as the President and CEO of the Fargo Moorhead West Fargo (FMWF) Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber's mission is to be a catalyst for economic growth and prosperity for businesses, members, and the greater community. On behalf of our over 1,900 members, I respectfully offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 2151, with the amendment offered by Senator Mathern.

First, I would like to take a moment to recognize and thank legislative leadership for their forethought on the importance of this committee. Given the gravity of the workforce challenges our businesses are facing, the business community is very thankful for the creation of this standing legislative committee to help address some of those challenges. Additionally, I would like to offer my thanks to Senator Tim Mathern for his leadership and dedication to this issue.

As you know, every state across the United States is competing to attract, develop, and retain workforce, hoping to fill thousands of open jobs. According to the latest federal Job Openings and Labor Report, the national average was nearly 1.9 job openings per available worker. In December of 2022, a U.S. Chamber study categorized North Dakota in the “most severe” workforce shortage category with 2.2 job openings per available worker. These statistics go to show that much of this workforce shortage is a numbers issue, we simply do not have enough capable individuals to fill the number of open jobs. Our state must effectively compete on a global scale for workforce to fill our thousands of open jobs. To do this, both the public and private sectors must work together to identify creative, innovative and multi-pronged solutions. We believe legal immigration and refugee resettlement are pivotal to addressing this crisis and are one of the prongs that are a part of a comprehensive solution.

Many of our business and industry leaders throughout our region have shared their desire to look beyond our nation’s borders to fill their open jobs but are all too often faced with several challenges. For example, many businesses do not have immigration experts on staff nor do they have access to the necessary information, resources, and legal services in their communities to assist in the hiring of immigrants or refugees. Due to this lack of resources, The FMWF Chamber and many other organizations throughout the state of North Dakota have asked for the establishment of an Office of Immigration to provide businesses with the much-needed resources to attract, retain, and develop talent from across the globe. It is critical that these services be strategically placed to ensure accessibility in regions with high workforce needs.

Additionally, I must emphasize the importance of not only the attraction of workforce but also the retention and development of these individuals. When these individuals move to North Dakota we must also focus our attention on retention strategies, to ensure these folks are properly acclimated and become well-rooted in our communities. As it relates to development, many of these individuals from outside the US possess a number of skills or a strong desire to develop a new set of skills.

Whether it be through post-secondary, credentialing, or on-the-job training, we must ensure we are equipping these individuals with skills to best prepare them for their future careers.

Lastly, as the legislature considers the establishment of this office, we recognize the importance of public-private partnerships when addressing this crisis. We are in full support of the expansion or inclusion of parameters to ensure both the employee and employer are obligated to the successful attraction, development, and retention of individuals. This obligation would ensure any funds are being expended strategically and judiciously, while preserving the integrity and sustainability of these programs for the future.

The workforce crisis our country is facing is complex and cannot be solved unilaterally. It is cyclical in nature and requires a great deal of creativity and innovation. Our state has the opportunity to lead the nation by establishing a strategic path forward that addresses the challenges faced by businesses and communities, as it relates to immigration and refugee resettlement. On behalf of our members, I would like to thank the committee for their time and consideration this morning. I will now stand for any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shannon Full". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Shannon" and the last name "Full" clearly distinguishable.

Shannon Full
President/CEO
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