

TESTIMONY OF

Katie Ralston Howe, Director, Workforce Development Division

Chair Wobbema and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee, my name is Katie Ralston Howe, workforce director for the ND Department of Commerce, and I'm here in support of the amendments introduced by Senator Lee. In my role, I also have the pleasure of serving as the director of the industry-led Workforce Development Council (WDC), which advises the Governor and the public concerning the nature and extent of workforce development needs in ND and identifies ways to effectively meet these needs. The Council has five core areas on which our work focuses: earlier and more diverse career exploration, addressing the technical skills gap, removing barriers to employment, recruitment and retention of ND workers, and occupational licensure reform. We have subcommittees dedicated to researching and developing recommendations to address challenges each of these areas. Today, I'd like to share information regarding research we've done on occupational licensure in ND which supports the intent of this bill.

In February 2020, the WDC created a subcommittee made up of legislators and a cross-functional group of representatives of those affected by ND's occupational licensing framework, including business and representatives of populations that experience barriers to entering or moving throughout the workforce, such as justice involved individuals, dislocated workers, and military members and spouses. The goal of this subcommittee is to remove unnecessary barriers to employment while preserving the health and safety of ND citizens and promoting competition. To accomplish this, the subcommittee has studied ND's schema for occupational licensing to develop a thorough understanding of licensing in our state; discover best practices; engage licensing boards and commissions; and identify the best path for reform.

During our initial research, we procured the services of the Council on Licensure Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR) and leaned heavily on subject matter expertise provided by Council of State Governments (CSG) and National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Included in the findings and recommendations of our report are opportunities that are identified in SB 2184.

First, uniform statute related to the role of licensure boards, required duties, and consistent board member training for all boards is critically important and identified as an opportunity in our research. There are five regulatory licensure structures that range from only autonomous boards that have complete control over their operation and processes to complete centralization of all boards under an agency that has regulatory authority, and boards serve only in an advisory capacity. ND is a prime example of a fully autonomous environment, in which occupational licensing boards and commissions act with clear independence, empowered to chart their own course and set their own policy agenda. One benefit of this model is that many of our boards are quite nimble in their work; however, some of the pitfalls that can stem from this structure are that ND is at greater exposure for fragmentation in board policies and processes.

Our report from CLEAR, specifically identified that ND may want to consider introducing elements of other models that would address the absence of broader coordination and confusion. One suggested

step toward this is uniform statute and training for boards to ensure consistent practices among all boards and board members, which is a standard practice in many states.

Section 1.4 is aligned with a priority of the Workforce Development Council, which is to support processes to remove barriers and expedite the path to licensure. Throughout our research, we learned that many boards have already established formal and informal practices to rapidly process and approve licenses; however, this is not consistent across all boards. This bill will prompt boards to evaluate their own processes to establish more formal methods for expediting licensure where possible and will require that these practices are documented through meeting notes which will promote consistency moving forward.

Overall, we're encouraged by what we've learned through our research and I'm glad to see our findings are informing legislation designed to improve the licensure landscape in ND. I'm happy to answer any questions today and as you continue to work on this bill. Thank you.