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Senate Bill 2187
Senate Workforce Development Committee
February 15th, 2023

Chairman Wobbema and Members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee,

My name is Faith Wahl, and I serve as the Student Body President at the University of North Dakota (UND). I am submitting testimony in favor of SB 2187, relating to the adoption of the counseling compact.

When considering SB 2187 and the positive impacts that it can have for North Dakota, I want to ensure that the voice of higher education students is considered. Students at UND and across the state currently have a great need for behavioral health services, which has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. The 2018 North Dakota Student Wellness and Perception Survey (ND SWAPS) [1] indicated that 17.5% of students reported being diagnosed with a major depressive disorder and 24.3% reported being diagnosed with generalized or social anxiety disorder. With roughly one in five students having a diagnosable mental health disorder, the need for licensed counselors to serve the student population is more important than ever. At UND's University Counseling Center (UCC), a student currently waits an average of three weeks between appointments with their assigned counselor. While UCC desires to help and serve more students, restrictions on licensure and limited staffing inhibit the ability to adequately serve students in need.

Based on the great need that students at UND are exhibiting, North Dakota would benefit from policies and legislation that will help recruit and retain licensed and professional mental health professionals for the state. SB 2187 establishes a counseling compact that would allow licensed professional counselors to serve individuals from other states that are a part of the compact. At UND, there are several students who do not have access to mental health services through the University Counseling Center because the counselors employed are not licensed in

[1] https://und.edu/student-life/wellness-center/_files/docs/health-promotion/und_institutional-report_2018.pdf

their home state. The adoption of the counseling compact outlined in SB 2187 would allow these students to seek services by the counselors that are willing to comply with the parameters outlined in Article IV (page 6) of SB 2187. At this time, around 80% of students are able to receive free services at the UCC based on the licensure of the practicing counselors, but the remaining 20% of students are forced to utilize off-campus resources where they may be faced with costly insurance premiums or other obstacles to receiving necessary care. Adopting the counseling compact would provide students the opportunity to receive consistent, convenient, and quality care that they need to be successful throughout their education.

In addition to being able serve students that are currently not able to receive free counseling services at UND, SB 2187 would expand telehealth opportunities for students at UND. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, students are opting to receive telehealth services for mental health visits as opposed to visiting a provider for services. When students return to their home states for winter break, spring break, or other time away from campus, they may be unable to receive telehealth services if they are not a resident of one of the states that UCC is able to serve. If SB 2187 were to pass, this barrier would be eliminated and students would have increased access to care through telehealth options. Furthermore, with the national audience that UND attracts through aerospace, engineering, medicine, law, and other high quality programs, expanded telehealth services would serve as a recruitment tool to help bring students to North Dakota for their education and career.

Chairman Wobbema and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee, I respectfully request a Do Pass recommendation on SB 2187. Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Faith Wahl