TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 2337

PRESENTED BY JAMES SCHMIDT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTH DAKOTA STATE ELECTRICAL BOARD

Chairman Wobbema, Members of the Work Force Development Committee:

I am James Schmidt, Executive Director of the North Dakota State Electrical Board (NDSEB) appearing for the board in opposition to Senate Bill 2337. The board firmly believes this bill would disrupt and delay the licensure for electricians within and those wanting to come into North Dakota. Similar bills have been proposed in past sessions, and have been defeated when the facts of what individual occupational and licensing boards do become fully known.

Since its inception in 1917, the NDSEB has licensed electricians, inspected all electrical installations in the state, conducted and monitored continuing education, and financed its own operations without an appropriation. It has also managed all of the other functions this bill would now place, at least partially, in the responsibility of OMB.

We have heard no complaints about the board's licensure process. The board processes over 1,000 applications for licensure each year which are reviewed and responded to on a weekly schedule. The board also schedules two days each month for licensing examinations.

Our state currently is a member of the National Electrical Reciprocal Alliance (NERA) which has 19 member states. To be a member of this group the state must have certain minimum licensing requirements. The purpose of our membership in this group is to allow ND electricians

to move between states, and allows an extremely streamlined process for electricians seeking to move or practice here. Someone entitled to reciprocity based on holding a license in a NERA state is routinely approved within five days of receipt of their application.

Some states and jurisdictions do not have licensure or have minimal requirements that make them ineligible for immediate reciprocity. The board also has an expedited path to licensure for these individuals. Individuals with experience in such states and jurisdictions are allowed to temporarily practice and take a placement exam which puts them on the path to full licensure. The board strongly believes its licensure process imposes the minimum burden necessary to protect ND citizens from both life safety concerns and financial harm from unqualified electricians.

The board has also taken significant steps to address future workforce development. With the statutory authority provided by the legislature in SB 2056 in 2019, the board initiated a scholarship program which provides North Dakota student apprentices $500 per semester to assist with books and tools. Since this program began, scholarships have been provided to 1,280 student apprentice electricians, who are the future of ND's electrical trade.

The board also supports and attends "Market Place for Kids" and other events across the state to enlighten elementary and middle school students about the electrical trade. At these events, we assist these students in performing interesting hands-on electrical exercises that hopefully will spark a lifelong interest in the trade.

Finally, the board has always done its own payroll, annual budgeting, providing continuing education and monitoring, submitting required

records/reports to other state agencies as required, and following OMB procurement and records retention rules. The board also works with the information technology department to take care of our data needs. All of this has been done efficiently and effectively to our knowledge, and we do not believe additional agency involvement is necessary or desirable.

The NDSEB is a specialized board overseeing a technical industry. At its core, the board's concern is safeguarding the residents of ND from electrical hazards and financial harm. It is always on the lookout for more efficient means and methods to streamline its procedures, while also maintaining that core function. We therefore urge a do not pass vote on SB 2337 or exempt/remove North Dakota State Electrical Board from this bill.

We thank the Committee for hearing our concerns.