

HB1221

House Appropriations – Education and Environment Division

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Chair Nathe and members of the Committee -

My name is D.J. Campbell, and I am a board member of the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education. In addition to this role, I serve on the North Dakota Workforce Development Council and previously contributed to the Greater North Dakota Chamber Workforce Policy Committee in preparation for the legislative session. I also chaired the Southwest Region TrainND Advisory Board in 2024. Professionally, I am the Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer for Sanford Health in Bismarck, where I lead workforce strategy and solutions for more than 16,000 positions across North Dakota, encompassing 4,000 distinct job profiles. I am here today to provide testimony in support of HB1221.

This bill would provide an appropriation of \$24 million to the Workforce Education Innovation Program established during the last biennium. The program supports the creation or enhancement of educational programs to address the workforce needs of North Dakota business and industry. This bill would allow the State Board of Higher Education to award funds across our 11 institutions to further develop academic programming to educate and train students in highly skilled and in-demand fields.

Published in November 2023, a Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report stated that by 2031, net new jobs in North Dakota requiring post-secondary education and training will grow by 24,000. Further, of all jobs in North Dakota, 71 percent (317,000 jobs) will require some training beyond high school in 2031. This means higher education’s role in workforce development will be even more crucial.

Institutions across the state have a longstanding history of collaboration with and support for business and industry, particularly in North Dakota’s key sectors of energy and agriculture. As workforce needs continue to evolve, it is imperative that we invest in emerging fields and industry transformations, including autonomous systems, cybersecurity, data security, manufacturing, and healthcare. With over 45,000 students enrolled across our campuses, our institutions play a vital role in attracting, developing, and preparing a skilled workforce to meet the demands of our state’s economy.

As both a Board member and a professional in the healthcare industry, I can offer a very specific example of where this Workforce Education Innovation Program can make a huge impact.

Nursing simulation provides opportunities for students to advance their hands-on skills, practice solving critical situations, and receive constructive feedback in a supportive learning environment. It has been a crucial part of North Dakota nursing education since 2005. Simulation has become increasingly vital due to the limited nursing student clinical placement sites and availability across the state. Current evidence demonstrates that simulation can replace up to 50% of clinical hours while retaining both excellent educational and practice outcomes.

However, these simulators come with a price tag and faculty is needed to meet national standards for simulation education. These resources, though, are what is required to strengthen the emergency medical response system across North Dakota by providing accessible and targeted training.

From a purely numerical standpoint, technology will be a critical factor in addressing workforce challenges. According to the 2020 Census, North Dakota is the only state that has not experienced a decline in its population of young people (defined as individuals 18 years old or younger). Coupled with the impending wave of retirements in the coming years, this demographic shift underscores a fundamental reality—there will simply not be enough workers to meet the growing demand. This reality reinforces the need for policies that enable the development of innovative academic programs designed to address today's workforce needs, particularly in the areas of artificial intelligence and digital transformation. Technological advancements in these fields will impact every sector of business and industry across the state, including efforts to support industry partners in upskilling their workforce. HB1221 and the Workforce Education Innovation Program will build upon the existing foundation, driving forward this critical transformation.

Workforce availability remains the primary challenge to our state's future economic growth. Innovative initiatives such as the Workforce Education Innovation Program, proposed by Representative Schreiber-Beck and supported by several legislators, will provide a strategic advantage in addressing these workforce challenges. By continuously enhancing academic programs in higher education, we can better equip students and employers for success, ensuring they are well-positioned to capitalize on emerging opportunities across the state.

This concludes my testimony related to HB1221. I respectfully request a **Do Pass** on the bill and will stand for questions from Committee members.