

Good morning, Chairman Nelson members of the committee.

My name is Donald Moncada, and I am a doctor from Nicaragua with over 25 years of experience in healthcare. Throughout my career, I have worked with international organizations, my country's Ministry of Health, and the private sector. My work has focused on health projects and communication initiatives for behavior change, including service organization, institutional strengthening, and quality improvement.

In February 2024, my family and I arrived in North Dakota as refugees. Before that, we had spent five years in Costa Rica after fleeing our home country. We were forced to leave our country due to the repression to all that think different.

When the United Nations Resettlement Program asked about our preferred location, we expressed a desire to avoid major cities—and we were assigned to Bismarck.

Before arriving, we did our research. We read about Bismarck online and learned about the Missouri River, the Heritage Center, the State Capitol, and North Dakota's relatively small population. We even watched live webcams, fascinated by the river freezing over, the vast white plains, and the striking green and white pine trees. These glimpses into our future home filled us with both curiosity and anticipation.

Nothing, however, could quite prepare us for experiencing a North Dakota winter firsthand. The cold was a stark contrast to what we were accustomed to—but the warmth of the people who welcomed us quickly overshadowed the freezing temperatures. Despite not knowing a single person, we were embraced with kindness and hospitality.

Adapting to life here came with challenges, particularly in language and transportation. While we had some basic English skills, using the language constantly was exhausting. Transportation became an issue one cold March evening when we decided to take our children to the mall, assuming it would be open late as it was in our previous homes. We arrived at 7 p.m., only to find it closed. With no car, we attempted to call a ride-sharing service, but after waiting outside in the freezing cold for over two hours, we realized we needed our own vehicle. Fortunately, we found the process of buying a car, registering it, and obtaining a driver's license in North Dakota to be surprisingly smooth.

Now, we truly appreciate the safety and tranquility of Bismarck. The city offers many opportunities, and we are eager to contribute. Personally, I obtained my Certified Nursing Assistant certificate and quickly found work in that field. I am deeply grateful to Job Service for their invaluable support during this process. Four months ago, I started a new role as a Health Navigator at Bismarck Global Neighbors, a wonderful nonprofit organization. This position allows me to give back to the community that has welcomed us so warmly.

Although I am not currently practicing as a doctor, my medical background has allowed me to assist individuals in navigating the healthcare system, particularly those who face barriers due to language, culture, or economic circumstances. I see firsthand how access to healthcare is essential for a thriving community. I hope to continue my studies and earn a Master's Degree in Public Health, which will enable me to contribute even more—helping

bridge gaps in healthcare access and ensuring that all members of our community, including newcomers, receive the care they need.

Bismarck is now our home. Our children are thriving—attending school, receiving a quality education, and being genuinely cared for by their teachers and principal. They have found a sense of belonging here, something we had lost in the years of uncertainty before arriving in North Dakota. We are deeply grateful for the support they receive—from ensuring they are nourished and prepared for the weather to encouraging their academic success.

As a father, my greatest hope is for my children to have a future filled with opportunities. Here in Bismarck, they have the chance to dream, to learn, and to grow in a stable and supportive environment. They are learning what it means to be part of a community that values hard work, kindness, and resilience. Seeing their excitement about their future—whether in science, the arts, or public service—fills me with hope and gratitude.

We are profoundly grateful for the opportunity to rebuild our lives here. Since our arrival, we have felt a special connection to this land and its people. The kindness and generosity of the Bismarck community have made us feel immediately at home.

We are honored to be part of this vibrant city and are deeply committed to contributing to its future. We want to work alongside our neighbors to build a strong, thriving community full of opportunity for generations to come. Our goal is to be good neighbors, responsible citizens, and active members of society—ready to give back in any way we can.

Thank you ...and God Bless You!
