

Testimony on Creation of a ND Accelerated Degree for High-Demand Occupations

House Education Committee

January 20, 2025

House Bill 1220

Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee. My name is Nikki Wegner, and I am the President with the North Dakota Long Term Care Association. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1220, which proposes the creation of accelerated degree programs for high-demand occupations in North Dakota. We are in support of initiatives that address the pressing workforce shortages our state faces, particularly in sectors like healthcare.

North Dakota is facing severe workforce shortages across multiple industries, with healthcare being among the most critical. For example, the state's nursing homes require 1,257 additional workers just to return to pre-pandemic staffing levels, highlighting the urgent need for action.

In 2001, the Legislature passed HB 1245 which expanded the options for becoming a nurse in ND. This legislation has been instrumental in removing barriers and creating more options to become a nurse, specifically licensed practical nurses (LPNs) or registered nurses (RNs) in North Dakota. Similarly, HB 1220 has the potential to create new opportunities across multiple fields.

While streamlining education for LPNs and RNs continues to help address nursing shortages, significant gaps remain in other critical healthcare fields, including respiratory therapy, physical and occupational therapy, dental services, and primary care. These professions are essential for community health, yet lengthy education pathways and workforce shortages limit access to care. Expanding opportunities for accelerated education and streamlined licensing in these high-demand areas would help ensure timely, quality care for North Dakotans while strengthening our healthcare system.

HB 1220 provides a proactive and strategic solution to North Dakota's workforce challenges by streamlining curricula to remove general education requirements and tailoring degree programs to workforce needs. By facilitating accelerated educational pathways, this legislation will enable quicker entry of qualified professionals into high-demand fields, helping to address critical shortages effectively. I urge the committee to

support HB 1220, fostering a stronger and more responsive workforce for the future of our state.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

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