



**Testimony in Support of HB 1524
North Dakota Legislative Assembly
Finance and Taxation Committee**

Date: February 3, 2025

Esteemed Chairman Headland and Committee Members,

My name is Zahi K. Atallah, I serve as the vice president of academic affairs at Williston State College (WSC) and as the acting director of TrainND Northwest. Please accept this letter as a testimony of our vehement support of House Bill 1524. This bill creates a lauded and much needed boost to the funding of regional planning councils through taxpayer support and appropriation.

House Bill 1524 is a crucial to addressing the need for structured and sustainable funding for regional councils across North Dakota. These councils play a vital role in fostering economic development, enhancing community planning, and ensuring the overall well-being of our varied regions. Moreover, our state's ability to compete nationally in innovation and attracting and maintaining businesses is greatly enhanced by the activities of these councils.

The Tri-County Regional Development Council (TCRDC) that serves northwest North Dakota has been instrumental in supporting the economic development efforts and the greater vision for the region. Furthermore, it is an integral partner of WSC in regional workforce development efforts. Honestly, without the TCRDC, the strategic trajectory of our region would be greatly diminished. For example, the TCRDC submitted a \$1.8 million EDA grant that allowed TrainND-NW to increase the capacity in the truck driving (CDL) and crane operation programs, in addition to acquiring new equipment that mirrors what local businesses use. The success of these programs is a testament to the visionary work of the TCRDC. Furthermore, the outcome for the students and their families has been transformational, with starting yearly salaries exceeding \$80,000. Between May 2022 and September 2024 TrainND-NW graduated 697 CDL drivers, 828 crane operators, and 432 heavy equipment operators. The impact on the local economy and business sustainability and competitiveness cannot be understated.

In conclusion, House Bill 1524 is a forward-thinking and necessary piece of legislation that will significantly benefit the state of North Dakota and the northwestern region's communities and businesses. By providing structured funding and support to regional planning councils, we can ensure the continued growth and development of our communities. I urge the committee to support this bill and recommend its passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration. But above all, thank you for your leadership in redefining our state's future.

Sincerely,

Zahi K. Atallah, Ph.D.
Vice President of Academic Affairs
Acting Director of TrainND Northwest