



**Testimony in Opposition  
to SB 1493 Relating  
to the Office of Legal  
Immigration**

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**TO:** House Industry, Business, and Labor Committee Members  
The sponsors of HB 1493

**FROM:** Derrick Gross- Executive Director:  
CATCH- Communities Acting Together for Change and Hope

**TOPIC:** Opposition to HB 1493 Relating to the Office of Legal Immigration

Removing the Office of Legal Immigration from Century Code is a bad idea!

As the Executive Director of CATCH I have had the privilege to work with, learn from, and collaborate with the staff at NDOLI to bring positive change to multiple rural North Dakota Communities.

CATCH Envision vital rural communities full of hope, compassion, and opportunity for all.

Our mission is to prepare rural communities to welcome foreign born families as permanent residents.

Why would we want to do that?

Because, rural North Dakota employers need employees!

Because, rural North Dakota communities need families!

Because, safe and supportive communities are a rare reality in many parts of the world, but they are so common in rural North Dakota that we take them for granted.

Because we need to build hope- real opportunity for a positive future for those who desire their rural communities to grow and thrive and for those seeking a safe place to raise a family.

We do this work because, "They need us. We need them."

Senator Tim Mather

In this testimony I will focus on 'We need them.'

According to USAfacts.org: North Dakota's population grew 15.5% from the 674,752 people who lived there in 2010 (2022 pop. 779,261). For comparison, the population in the US grew 7.7% during that period.

ND has 401 census designated areas. Crunching some numbers from World Population Review tells us that from 2010 - 2024, 307 of those populations were in decline or had a population of less than 100, or both during the same period of great overall statewide growth referenced above.

For context: From 2010 - 2020 the top twenty population centers in ND accounted for over 95% of the growth.

From 2020 - 2024, the state continued to grow at about the same rate with the top twenty population centers accounting for 134% of the growth.

Note: Five of the top twenty: Beuhla, Devils Lake, Valley City, Grafton, and Minot AFB), were among the 307 in decline.

Putting all that in one statement: During a period of unprecedented statewide growth, over 75% of North Dakota is suffering because of outmigration.

The resettlement of foreign born families as permanent residents can be a part of the solution to that problem, and the Office of Legal Immigration is one of the key components.

One recently published argument in favor of HB 1493 was “There are enough people who are American citizens who are looking for work....”

I will rebut with two points:

- In 2002 when I was hired for my first teaching job I was one of 90 applicants for a single 4th grade position. During seven years as a school administrator it was common to be forced to hire the only applicant that applied or for positions to go unfilled with no applicants at all. Not just teaching positions. In 2024, serving in my final year as a principal, I had to learn how to fire and service the coal boiler because we were that short on custodians. Yes we advertised. No, we didn't receive qualified applicants.
- CATCH works with one employer that had an annual turnover rate of over 80% in a roughly 100 employee operation prior to bringing in foreign born workers. Today, the turn over rate in that organization is under 40%, and continuing to improve.

The Office of Legal Immigration understands all the facts I have shared and has proven to be instrumental in collaborating with organizations like CATCH to help solve the workforce and population decline challenges facing rural North Dakota. The State's investment in NDOLI is an investment in the workforce, the employers, the communities, and the State as a whole- the entire state!. And, it is one that will have a significant return on investment.

They need us. We need them!