

Written Testimony in Support of the North Dakota Challenge Grant

Presented to the ND Senate Appropriations – Education and Environment Division

Submitted by: Kevin Wolf, Former Owner of Laney's Inc., Fargo, North Dakota
NDSU Foundation Executive Governing Board Member

January 21, 2025

Dear Chairman, Sorvaag and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Kevin Wolf, and I am a trustee of the NDSU Foundation and serve on the Foundation's Executive Governing Board. I am the former owner of Laney's Inc., a mechanical services organization serving people in Fargo and the surrounding Red River Valley. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the North Dakota Higher Education Challenge Grant Fund.

Governor Kelly Armstrong is proposing \$50 million be invested in the next biennium for the program, and as a stakeholder in North Dakota State University and the future of North Dakota, I strongly support this request.

Coming from a family of NDSU graduates including my parents, wife, three children, and myself, I have come to appreciate the value and impact that NDSU has had not only on our lives, but also the lives of all North Dakotans from Bowman to Fargo. It has helped to build our communities, expand our workforce thus strengthening our economy, but fulfilling this mission requires increased and consistent investment in the North Dakota University System. Also, having owned and operated a North Dakota based business, I understand the challenge and appreciate the importance of having a healthy workforce development cycle that is supported by a strong and well-funded university system.

The reason that the North Dakota Higher Education Challenge Grant is so important to me is twofold. First, the impact on scholarship endowments. About eight years ago our family made the decision to create the Wolf Family Scholarship Endowment in memory of our mother and father, who were both NDSU pharmacy graduates and who practiced in North Dakota following their graduation. This was not only a way to honor them but also a vehicle for us to give back to NDSU, the institution that provided us with an education and future opportunity. In subsequent years, as the Challenge Grant unfolded, it not only motivated us to continue to grow our established scholarship endowment but also inspired us to establish an additional

endowment with the purpose of attracting North Dakota students to enroll at NDSU. The Challenge Grant concept is the right way for North Dakota to support education in this state because it is a joint investment between the State and people who want to support students and education. With matching funds, a \$50 million investment from the state will drive \$150 million of investment in North Dakota higher education over the next two years. Let's use this investment to encourage students to enroll and stay in North Dakota – which is needed now, more than ever.

I agree with Governor Armstrong when he says this program is “**a proven tool**” that ensures North Dakota students stay in North Dakota schools.

With Challenge Grant funding, we can make North Dakota higher education more attainable and competitive in recruiting and retaining talent against our neighboring states, opening a pathway to encourage these graduates to live and work in the state.

When it really comes down to it, access to affordable and quality education is **life changing**. Our family has experienced this first-hand speaking with the recipients of the Wolf Family Scholarship. The Challenge Grant is a private-public partnership, and as a donor, we would love to continue to partner with public dollars to maximize impact on campus. And trust me... we are not alone. However, continuing the Challenge Grant program, how it has traditionally been funded will not lead to the benefits or return on investment North Dakota is seeking from its higher education institutions.

I urge this committee to fund the Challenge Grant at an unprecedented level and challenge the private sector to respond. I'm confident they will. This investment is not an expenditure; it is a commitment to North Dakota and our future workforce.

Thank you for considering this opportunity and for your continued service to North Dakota.

Regards,

Kevin Wolf
NDSU Supporter &
NDSU Foundation Trustee & Member of the Executive Governing Board