



OFFICE of the PRESIDENT

20 January 2025

Members of the Senate Appropriations – Education and Environment Division:

My name is Monsignor James P. Shea, and I am the President of the University of Mary and a proud alumnus of North Dakota's University of Jamestown. I am writing to you in support of SB 2003, regarding the North Dakota Challenge Grant Program.

I am asking for your consideration in expanding the North Dakota Challenge Grant Program to include North Dakota-based private universities as eligible applicants to use the funds solely for scholarship use and solely for graduates of North Dakota high schools.

The state of North Dakota is experiencing a critical need for a post-secondary educated workforce. As of December 2024, 52.6% of unfilled positions in the state required a form of post-secondary education. This is up from 48% compared to this time two years ago. Both Governors Burgum and Armstrong have described this workforce shortage as North Dakota's number one barrier to economic growth.

In 1959, the University of Mary was founded to serve the state's need for education, and here, 66 years later, we are still serving this great state's critical workforce needs through our post-secondary programs.

About 43% of our students are from North Dakota, and nearly 60% of our graduates join the North Dakota workforce post-graduation. Students at the University of Mary are being trained to serve our North Dakota community, and we would like your help to advance this mission. Allowing private, North-Dakota-based universities to participate in the North Dakota Challenge Grant would allow for the leveraging of donations that would greatly appeal to our donor base. Currently we find ourselves in a position where every dollar donated to the University of Mary, and all private, North Dakota-based universities, is less valuable than a dollar contributed to the foundations of our public counterparts.

Considering that these dollars are aimed at building up the educated workforce in North Dakota at a time of critical need, we would like to see our donor base rewarded for their investment in the state rather than pitted against our public counterparts at a severe disadvantage.

Only 6.1% of the North Dakota graduating class of 2023 chose to attend a private school for post-secondary education. Of this group, over 52% chose to leave the state for private education.

As we know from data, private secondary education makes up only a small portion of our residents' interest in post-secondary education, but many of our residents choose to leave the state to pursue this goal. I would like the committee to know that our goal in becoming a participant in the North Dakota Challenge Grant is not to take away from funding or interest in our public universities, but instead to expand the opportunity for our residents who seek a private education—and to open up the opportunity for them to consider that education right here at home.

Bringing private, North Dakota-based universities into the donation matching grant would not be a means of the public funding private education, but instead the state funding North Dakota residents in support of their post-secondary education.

From 2023-2024 University of Mary students received \$1.48 million through many North Dakota state scholarships. We are not seeking state funding for private schools. We are seeking the state's investment in the education of our North Dakota residents. The amendment we are proposing is one where our matching fund is made specifically available for scholarships and exclusively to graduates of North Dakota high schools.

Thank you for supporting this grant over the years, as it is an amazing tool for promoting the post-secondary education of the residents of this great state. I also thank you for your consideration to include private North Dakota-based universities and their foundations in the Challenge Grant Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Msgr. James P. Shea". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Monsignor James P. Shea
President

for Life.