

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Arik Spencer, and I am the President and CEO of the Greater North Dakota Chamber. GNDC is North Dakota's largest statewide business advocacy organization, with membership represented by small and large businesses, local chambers, and trade and industry associations across the state. We stand in **opposition to Section 2 of SB 2249.**

In our 2024 ND Economics and Employer Survey of our membership, when asked to name one thing the state government could do to help your business, the top answer was to make healthcare more affordable, not more expensive, which SB 2249 may do.

Last fall, the Insurance Commissioner approved small group insurance premium increases between 6.3 and 15.3 percent for the 2025 plan year. Healthcare and prescription drug coverage mandates, like SB 2249, increase business burdens and costs. These increases leave employers with hard decisions. Do they continue offering employer-sponsored health insurance, or do they provide cost-of-living raises to help employees pay for rent and groceries?

The bill's lack of a fiscal note is concerning as increases in benefits should be weighed by the costs employers will bear. If this bill were only applicable to state employees, we would not have an issue. We will be the first to say that employers should have autonomy in developing compensation packages. However, this bill specifically includes a requirement that PERS draft a bill for the next legislative session, applying this to the private sector.

As drafted, rather than making healthcare more affordable, this will increase business costs by shifting them to the employer, especially when you consider that there are eight other bills this session that include healthcare and drug mandates that would or could be applied in the future. These costs add up, and they don't go away.