



SB 2146

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Eniola Soetan, North Dakota Student Association

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Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Eniola Soetan, and I am a delegate of the North Dakota Student Association. I am writing to express my support for SB 2146.

The North Dakota Student Association (NDSA) is a student organization established in 1969 that is dedicated to ensuring that students have a voice in policy that affects Higher Education. The NDSA consists of delegates from each of the 11 public institutions that meet monthly to engage students in Higher Education policy in North Dakota. Our mission is to empower students, foster collaboration between students across campuses in the North Dakota University System (NDUS), and to advocate on issues of higher education in support of access, affordability, quality, and the student experience.

The NDSA is committed to representing the voice and interests of the 45,000 postsecondary students served across the NDUS, and furthermore advocating for these interests. The NDSA recognizes the diverse population of students that it serves along with the variety of needs that may come with serving such a diverse population.

Per the American Journal of Occupational Therapy, the purpose of occupational therapy is “enhancing or enabling participation in roles, habits, and routines in home, school, workplace, community, and other settings” [\[1\]](#). Occupational therapy services are instrumental in ensuring that students are able to make the most of their education, and furthermore be able to adequately “receive education preparing them to enter workforces in emerging technologies with an emphasis on the North Dakota workforce”, which is an NDSA legislative priority for the 2025-2027 biennium as outlined in [NDSA-01-2425](#). Increasing access to occupational therapy services in the state of North Dakota ultimately creates more opportunities for existing NDUS students to

enhance their educational participation, as well as for potential new NDUS students who may not have seen themselves able to thrive in a post-secondary setting without the help of such a fruitful service.

According to a May 2020 fact sheet done by the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, only 29.6% of occupational therapists and occupational therapist assistants practiced in rural areas of North Dakota [2]. Of that 29.6%, 18.1% practiced in large rural areas, 5.8% practiced in small rural areas, and 5.7% were employed in isolated rural areas [2]. Despite this spread, students and residents in all areas of the state deserve to have easy access to potentially lifechanging occupational therapy services. By fostering collaboration with nearby states, SB 2145 increases the availability of occupational therapy services for every North Dakotan, and therefore cultivates improvements in quality of life for North Dakotan residents, and improvements in educational participation for the NDUS students that the NDSA serves.

Furthermore, by enacting SB 2145, we would be opening greater employment opportunities for current occupational therapists and pre-occupational therapist students in North Dakota by creating whole new demographics for which occupational therapists could serve while retaining North Dakota residency. In this way, we can further assure that the education that North Dakota students are receiving is allowing them to enter the workforce in more innovative and extensive ways, effectively preparing them and setting them up for life after their postsecondary education.

To support the 45,000 students served by the NDSA, increase the quality of the NDUS student experience, and further bolster NDUS students with opportunities to enter into the workforce, I would like to express my support for SB 2146, and on behalf of the NDSA ask for a DO PASS recommendation on SB 2146 from the committee.

[1]- <https://ahs.uic.edu/news-stories/occupational-therapy-an-untapped-resource-in-student-mental-health-and-well-being/>

[2]- https://med.und.edu/service/healthcare-workforce/_files/docs/2020/occupational-therapists-and-otas-2020.pdf

