

TESTIMONY OF

Katie Ralston Howe, Director, Workforce Development Division

Chairman Wobbema and members of the committee, I'm Katie Ralston Howe, Workforce Development Director for the ND Department of Commerce. In my role, I also serve as the executive director of the industry-led Workforce Development Council (WDC), which drives the development of the state's workforce strategy. The WDC's mission is to advise the Governor and public concerning the nature and extent of workforce needs in the state and to provide recommendations for addressing those needs while maximizing resources and avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort. I'm here in support of SB 2239.

The WDC has been a supporter of apprenticeship for many years and currently has a multi-faceted recommendation designed to increase apprenticeship participation in the state. Included within this recommendation is a scholarship (or grant) that is directly aligned with what SB 2239 seeks to create.

Many apprenticeships require upfront costs for tools and supplies, which can be a financial burden that prevents qualified candidates from participating in a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP). Providing a financial resource to remove a barrier to entry for apprentices will support increased participation in this successful workforce training and retention model, especially with the dedicated efforts to support apprenticeship programs being proposed in HB 1036. Additionally, this resource may incentivize students to enter directly into RAPs, thereby increasing the number of young adults that fill jobs in high-demand occupations.

In the spirit of reducing unnecessary duplication of effort and streamlining services, I support Commissioner Greenberg's recommendation to house the apprenticeship grant in Job Service North Dakota (JSND). Job Service is already working with jobseekers who are interested in training for new career paths, in addition to working with employers to fill their vacancies. They have the best handle on the needs of employers across the state and are the best equipped to connect potential apprentices with new and existing RAPs. Housing this resource within JSND will also give the agency an important tool to support individuals who are not eligible for federal WIOA programs, but still need financial assistance to pursue an apprenticeship.

Thank you.