



Testimony of Amy Whitney  
SB 2256  
January 31, 2025

Chairman Wobbema and Members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2256 regarding a research and technology park fund. For the record, my name is Amy Whitney, Director of the UND Center for Innovation. I have been fortunate to serve in this role for six and a half years. My goal is to provide information about related work we have done at the University of North Dakota. I believe this will be helpful as you consider the increased impact that NDSU's technology research park can have through this type of funding.

I see huge value in North Dakota's investment in the areas of autonomy and defense. Furthermore, I foresee an amazing collaboration opportunity between NDSU and UND with this type of funding as it capitalizes upon the expertise and infrastructure that exists at both universities. UND and Grand Forks have a robust UAS and autonomous systems ecosystem, and it is widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive in the nation. At the same time, it is important to avoid unnecessary replication, and we should always look for ways to foster stronger partnerships.

This investment can pay dividends to North Dakota. This statement is based on my experience and the Center for Innovation's proven track record of successfully launching businesses and fostering startups for the past four decades. We manage more than 11,000 square feet across two facilities. Every day, Center staff facilitate connections between companies and UND talent in the fields of autonomous systems, defense, health care, and more. We also make significant contributions to North Dakota's economic growth. Presently, our 74 member companies employ more than 200 people. Furthermore, through a five-year federal grant, we supported 21 autonomous system companies that created 96 jobs, 40 internships, raised over \$39 million in capital, and earned more than \$5 million in revenue. The Center's InternGF program, in conjunction with the Grand Forks Economic Development Corporation, provides internships for students at local startups and achieves a notable 60% retention rate of students transitioning into high-paying positions in North Dakota. This results in an average annual increase of \$382,000 in wages earned. The Center for Innovation



generates substantial long-term economic impact in North Dakota, and the same is possible at a place such as the NDSU Research Technology Park.

This work comes at a cost. 40% of the UND Center for Innovation's operating budget is covered by an array of funding sources, including federal and state grants, donations, and fee-for-service activities. The other 60% of our operating budget is funded by the University of North Dakota.

When considering SB 2256, I believe it is important to recognize the opportunity to have both NDSU and UND involved in this important work. This can be accomplished by identifying UND as a partner in Section 1, paragraph 4 of the bill. This addition codifies a partnership between the state's two research universities, encourages continued collaboration, and ensures that North Dakota leverages its full research and innovation potential. Further, it strengthens the state's position as a leader in autonomous systems and defense applications while avoiding unnecessary duplication of resources and effort.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to share this information with you.