

January 30, 2025

Testimony in Support for Senate Bill 2256 – Research and Technology Park Fund

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

The National Robotics Engineering Center (NREC) at Carnegie Mellon University is excited to partner with the NDSU Research and Technology Park (RTP) to create a robotics R&D center in North Dakota to replicate the success and impact NREC has had in the Pittsburgh region over the last 30 years.

We visited the RTP and surrounding community in May of 2024, and it was clear that they bring significant value to this partnership, which will translate into maximum impact for the region and also help NREC further its mission. The RTP already has many of the key elements needed for a successful robotic center, including existing facilities with labs and an innovation studio, established support for start-ups, visionary leadership with business experience, existing relationships with potential customers (defense companies, agriculture companies, etc.), access to talent from NDSU and local industry, and access to unique test sites (e.g. drone testing, ag robot testing) in North Dakota. There is also a strong entrepreneurial spirit in the region, which is essential for rapid growth of the robotic ecosystem.

In this mutually beneficial partnership, we clearly see potential for the successful creation and growth of an ecosystem centered around robotics with immense impact for the state in terms of innovation, creation of high-paying jobs, economic growth, and a thriving community.

Both economic experts and technology experts agree that robotics and AI is a rapidly growing industry that is on track to soon become ubiquitous across all sectors from agriculture, defense, construction, logistics, retail, transportation, manufacturing, chemical, medical, and more. By creating a robotics R&D center in partnership with the RTP, we aim to build a high-tech industry in North Dakota to capitalize on this robotics and AI revolution.

NREC was established in 1995 through a partnership between CMU and NASA, with support from state and local governments sharing a mission to develop advanced robotic solutions and support their commercialization. Through successful project execution and technology transfer, NREC became a catalyst for Pittsburgh's transformation into a technology hub, particularly in robotics and AI, and the center has had a measurable impact in the community by spurring neighborhood development, increasing household incomes, and job growth.

Over the years, NREC alumni have founded numerous companies, contributing to Pittsburgh's economic resurgence. Many alumni remain in the region, driving the local tech sector. Among the 120+ start-ups in the Pittsburgh region, many have ties to NREC in one way or another, fostering a robust innovation ecosystem. Furthermore, NREC supports educational initiatives to develop the future robotics workforce, including K-12 programs, teacher training, community college courses and workforce development.

We fully support this partnership and are committed to working with the RTP to assist with the creation and growth of a robotics center, foster the innovation ecosystem, and accelerate its impact for the region.

Sincerely,

Jeff Legault
Associate Director
National Robotics Engineering Center
Carnegie Mellon University