

Testimony on Workforce Needs and Workforce Development

Presented by Beth Zander
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to the

Economic Development Committee
Representative Rick Berg, Committee Chairman

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Representative Berg, members of the Economic Development Committee, I am Beth Zander, representing the Customer Services Area of Job Service North Dakota. I'm here today to discuss ways in which North Dakota can address its workforce needs.

Job Service North Dakota takes very seriously the responsibility of assisting its business partners in their worker recruitment efforts, and in assisting job seekers in obtaining and retaining viable employment. Our strong, up-to-date labor market information (LMI) is the core component that supports the state's workforce development efforts. Our LMI tools, such as the *Local Area Compensation Guides* and *Local Area Profiles* provide employers and economic developers with information to gauge economic growth and draw comparisons across industries for average employment and wages. Information such as our *North Dakota Employment Projections 2012* is used to assist our workforce in their job search and in determining their training options.

Our information products are frequently localized into thirteen geographic areas of the state, which makes them quick, easy references for business and economic decision making, and in some instances they are the only ones of their type in the nation.

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Labor market information is the key to helping our employers and seekers make good decisions.

Job Service North Dakota's services are demand driven. From the LMI products to joint, industry-specific recruitment, we strive to meet changing workforce demands. Our partnership with the oil industry to quickly fill a rapidly growing number of oil field positions exemplifies our responsiveness to workforce needs. I have attached a publication from the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission (IOGCC) for your perusal. The publication clearly and repeatedly cites the successful collaborative efforts of the industry, Job Service, the Governor's Office, media and education in meeting industry needs. Throughout the document you will see references to the success of this effort. For example, Bob Mau, owner of Eagle Operating in Kenmare is quoted as saying, "At first, I thought Job Service North Dakota was just another bureaucracy. Then the Governor brought us all together and things started to happen. This program benefited the industry tremendously." I mention that, not to belabor what we *have* done, but to emphasize the value of uniting key players into a synergistic effort – we all brought something to the table in that endeavor and it was successful. We will continue to play a key role in successful efforts such as this.

Job Service also plays a notable role in the state's training community. Through programs such as Workforce 20/20 and the Workforce Investment Act, we make training funds available to employers and workers in high demand occupations, primary sector businesses and growing industries.

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As a proactive agent in workforce solutions, we constantly seek ways to meet emerging business and worker needs. Our partnership with the Department of Human Services, in providing case management, work readiness, job search and job retention services to the state's TANF clients serves as a model for successfully bringing populations of working poor and chronically unemployed into the mainstream workforce.

We are currently operating pilot projects in Dickinson and Grand Forks, where we provide similar services to individuals delinquent in their child support payments. As with the TANF/JOBS program, the Parental Employment Program, or PEP, delivers case management, job development, job readiness, job retention, and follow up services to individuals who are delinquent in their child support payments. This is a collaborative effort between Job Service North Dakota, the Child Support Enforcement Unit, DHS, and the judicial system that will likely expand to statewide levels in the future. The Dickinson project, which has been operational longer than the project in Grand Forks, has reported the following statistics from April 2005 to present:

- 48 individuals have been enrolled who would otherwise have faced 1-3 months in jail for failure to pay support. These individuals are in arrears for support ranging from \$9,000 to \$70,000.
- Of the 48 individuals, 36 became employed. Some from this group of 36 and others who did not become employed have been referred by us into treatment programs for substance abuse or domestic issues, sent for psychiatric treatment, or are receiving our assistance in applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) due to disabilities.

In support of these efforts, we are currently in the examination stages of a training program for our state's unemployed and underemployed that would double as a feeder program for job listings. While we do not have the capacity to expand these services beyond our current resources, they can serve as a model for success in tapping the state's labor pool reserves.

We support collaborative exploration of the problems and development of the solutions to business recruitment needs, including understanding the populations of unemployed and underemployed individuals, their skills needs, and the mechanisms to bring them together with employers. We bring to the table valuable labor market information for employers and seekers; a strong understanding of the employability factors affecting job retention in North Dakota's tightening labor market; and access to workforce training opportunities.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, we are excited about the prospect of a collaborative effort to identify core groups of potential workers and to develop the solutions that get them fully engaged in the workforce. This concludes my report. I would be glad to take questions from the Committee.