



## **2021 SB 2198**

### **Senate Industry, Business and Labor Committee**

#### **Senator Jerry Klein, Chairman**

**January 19, 2021**

Chairman Klein and members of the Senate Industry, Business and Labor Committee, I am Tim Blasl, President of the North Dakota Hospital Association (NDHA). I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 2198. I ask that you give this bill a **Do Pass** recommendation.

Hospitals are here today in support of this bill because it provides for a nursing workforce recruitment and retention grant program. Funds would be provided to the department of commerce to award grants to an organization dedicated to empowering, encouraging, and equipping North Dakota's nursing profession. The funds could be used for operating costs of the organization, including to establish a recruitment and retention program for traveling nurses to assist the state's nursing workforce.

As you know, workforce challenges threaten access to health care services and the quality of care. We experienced that in sharp focus during the height of COVID-19 hospitalizations last fall. Without nurses, it does not matter how many beds we can physically add to our hospitals. We need trained nurses to be able to care for patients. With approximately 1,000 unfilled nursing positions, North Dakota health care providers have been forced to hire expensive, temporary nursing staff during the pandemic. Hospitals unable to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of nurses increasingly were forced to divert patients out of town or even out of state.

Even before the pandemic, there was a serious and growing nurse shortage. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of healthcare occupations is projected to grow 19 percent from 2014 to 2024 - much faster than the average for all occupations. During this time, health care occupations will add more jobs than any other group of occupations. This growth is expected due to an aging population, growing rates of chronic conditions such as diabetes and obesity, and a retiring labor force – all things that will be with us long after the COVID-19 pandemic has passed.

Despite strong interest in healthcare careers, thousands of qualified applicants cannot gain entry into a training program. Training health care professionals in North Dakota will require ongoing, targeted investment in programs to increase faculty, allow seamless transitions between undergraduate degree programs, and provide incentives for providers to participate in clinical training of students. Retention of health care workers will also be key to ensuring the workforce shortage does not grow.

In summary, NDHA supports legislation to encourage recruitment and retention of nurses in our state. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim Blasl, President  
North Dakota Hospital Association