

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Andrea Pfennig with the Greater North Dakota Chamber. GNDC is North Dakota's largest statewide business advocacy organization, with membership represented by small and large businesses, local chambers, and trade and industry associations across the state. We stand in support of SB 2142 with amendments.

Recently, GNDC partnered with the NDSU Challey Institute for Global Innovation and Growth to complete a survey about the business climate in North Dakota. The survey found that 62% of respondents felt the number one factor holding businesses back is difficulty attracting and retaining qualified workers. The ability to have access to a skilled workforce is a critical issue for our members. As a result, one of our policy positions is to support workforce readiness opportunities for transitioning populations. SB 2142 would establish an Office of Immigration and we support this concept. We hope that consideration will be given to establishing expertise at the state level to advise North Dakota businesses on immigration policy. When we tried to explore this issue over the interim, we were unable to find a resource at the state level that could provide basic statistics.

This is a complex issue, especially for smaller businesses. Having a state led resource for companies that wish to pursue this avenue in meeting their workforce needs would be beneficial to the business community.

The bill includes the development of a fee system to be assessed to each business benefiting from employment of immigrant workers as a result of assistance provided. However, without clearly defined benefits the business community would be receiving, development of a fee structure at this juncture may be premature.

We are in support of practical solutions that remove barriers to entering the workforce such as training and strategies to address language barriers. We would be happy to help identify solutions from the business community's perspective as this concept moves forward.

Because of that, we hope you will consider the following changes to the bill:

- Inclusion of collaboration with private sector businesses and nonprofit organizations to identify barriers in hiring immigrants and refugees and develop solutions.
- Establishment of a State led resource to North Dakota businesses regarding immigration policy and recruitment of immigrant workers.
- Funding to contract additional services and expertise to address any knowledge gaps in the state's current resources.
- Inclusion of matching grants for North Dakota businesses to address barriers to employing immigrant workers.

Thank you for your consideration.