

Senate Workforce Development
Chairman – Senator Michael Wobbema
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Testimony of:

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Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Wobbema, members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee, I am Mark Lyman, economic development specialist for the Minot Area Chamber EDC. I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 2342.

The Needs

Workforce challenges are great throughout the state, with specific needs in northcentral North Dakota. These include the following items, as discussed by Region 2 partners during the recent North Dakota Regional Workforce Impact Program (ND RWIP) process: affordable childcare slots, more trained nurses/healthcare employees, interest in jobs requiring a CDL, mental health concerns, education repayment, talent attraction, retention in law enforcement positions, upskilling or retraining current employees, etc. This list is NOT all inclusive. The needs are great in our region.

The Opportunity

The Trinity Health main hospital has been a downtown mainstay in Minot for more than 100 years. Trinity Health will be opening their \$500+ million new Healthcare Campus and Medical District in just a few months. With that amazing addition to our region, this provides an opportunity to re-purpose a soon-to-be-available building downtown toward our region's largest needs – some of the workforce needs already identified.

A Solution

Our solution to help revitalize a main street, downtown building as well as work toward solving key workforce initiatives and strengthen our community is through a multi-prong approach to repurpose this hospital facility. The building is nearly 240,000 square feet and will be vacant later this year. It's 6 floors, with a unique set-up on the first three floors. Each of these three floors has a separate entrance at each level. This provides a unique ability to house three distinct types of workforce solutions, that don't have to share lobbies or main entrances. We could envision, with these planning dollars, that one of the first three floors could go toward a daycare facility, that one of the first three floors could go toward nursing and healthcare simulators (to take advantage of existing hospital infrastructure and layout), and that a third floor could be for behavioral health. This solution includes a planning process that involves public and private partnerships between key players in the region.

The Challenge

Striking while the iron is hot with a bold, innovative approach to workforce development doesn't happen overnight. A potentially transformative Workforce Development center for north central North Dakota is within view but getting there with the right programs and services in place will take time, effort, and funding.

Our Ask

We would ask that the North Dakota State Legislature provide up to \$2.25 million in a grant to allow the Minot Area Chamber EDC to properly plan for and design at least the first three floors of the Trinity Health hospital building in downtown Minot to address workforce concerns. We recognize the need for local "skin in the game" and would secure funding of one dollar for every four dollars provided by this North Dakota Department of Commerce grant. With approval on section 2 of this senate bill, we would then plan to apply for all or a portion of the funding, depending on the results of the planning grant.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we want to be smart and deliberate with addressing the highest workforce concerns for the region. These planning dollars will help us do that.

We want to be smart and deliberate on how we, as a community, revitalize this hospital space to serve our workforce for generations to come. The up to \$20 million in the workforce hospital grant program will help us do just that.

I ask for your support of SB 2342 and will stand by for any questions that you may have.