



March 14, 2025

Chairman Nathe and members of the House Appropriations Education and Environment Division:

I am Kristi Kasprick, Project Manager for Real. Good. Northeast North Dakota, a Region 4 workforce attraction initiative serving Nelson, Pembina and Walsh Counties. Our initiative, funded by the Regional Workforce Impact Program (RWIP), is significantly aiding employers in recruiting and retaining employees in our rural region.

I write today to speak to the Regional Workforce Impact Program (RWIP) funding included in SB 2018, the North Dakota Commerce appropriations bill. In the original appropriations bill \$10 million was earmarked for RWIP Grants. Previously, this program has proven successful, with many more requests received than there was funding available. SB 2018 has been reduced to funding of \$5 million. I respectfully ask you to consider amending the bill to at least match the original allocation of \$10 million. As someone with direct experience in workforce development in rural areas, full funding is needed.

Real. Good. Northeast North Dakota, which has been funded with RWIP awards of \$398,264 and regional matches of \$133,500 to the Walsh County Job Development Authority in two rounds of funding, launched in July 2023. It is instrumental in addressing the need for over 1,500 new employees across various industries in our three rural counties. Our brand marketing strategy and action plan targets boomerangs, young families, manufacturing leaders, transitioning military personnel, and small town entrepreneurs.

In 2024-25, enhancements to Real. Good. is aiming to increase awareness of work and lifestyle opportunities in the region, which has been underpromoted to areas outside the immediate region. Using paid marketing, visual marketing assets, a Relocation Guide and New Resident Roadmap, this initiative is serving as a tool for our businesses and residents to become community champions, inviting and recruiting people to the region, and growing our small towns.

The initiative has had a tangible positive impact on recruiting and retention efforts, as evidenced by feedback from regional employers:

- Crystal Beggs from Leading Edge Equipment in Michigan, ND states, "The Real. Good. initiative is an asset in our recruitment and retention efforts. By showcasing the unique benefits of living and working in our area, this program has helped attract and retain talent to strengthen our workforce."
- Misty Johnson, Marvin Senior HR Manager, adds, "Marvin in Grafton, ND is grateful to have a partner like the Real. Good. initiative to help improve the recruitment efforts in our community. The ease of sharing the website and collaboration of the NE manufacturing plants helps paint a clear conversation and picture of what it means to live in our rural area."

In recent weeks, our initiative has provided crucial assistance to employers and prospective movers, including:

- Assisted a freight broker in Pembina with finding housing options for relocating employees and provided area information. This conversation also led to a meeting with city officials, employers and the Red River Community Housing Development Organization to create a plan for additional housing in the community.
- Assisted a plumbing contractor and an electrical contractor in finding a new talent pipeline option through the Department of Defense Skillbridge Program.
- Fielded an inquiry from a potential day care provider in Pembina County and provided a referral to the Job Development Authority to help develop a business plan and explore funding opportunities.
- Pushed out resource information to employers regarding the Relocation Opportunity for Outstanding Talent (ROOT) and Technical Skills Training Grant programs and upskilling training opportunities that help retain employees.
- Provided relocation information from individuals wanting more information about the area, residency and finding a home.
- Provided relocation resources to nursing home and hospital administrators, manufacturers and implement dealers to help with recruiting workforce and sharing the region's assets with potential relocators.

To build on this success and address growing workforce development needs, we are developing plans to:

- Enhance business capabilities and attractiveness through training partnerships and employee incentives
- Create a supportive system for career development and entrepreneurship
- Provide essential resources for entrepreneurs
- Promote Real. Good. with educational institutions to attract young professionals

While we are working towards a public-private partnership with area employers, additional funding is crucial to furthering our workforce development activities to fill our jobs and grow our small towns. The initial RWIP funding has proven invaluable in assisting our area employers with the complex task of rural recruitment. Continued support will allow us to build on this momentum, further developing our workforce and strengthening our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

Kristi Kasprick
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