

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Andrea Pfennig, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs for 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 House Bill 1064.

In our 2024 ND Economics and Employer Survey of our membership, 70% of respondents indicated they were having trouble hiring employees. Labor availability has been identified as the top business concern facing companies in North Dakota.

Because of this, our members feel it is important to maximize the flexibility of educational institutions. Streamlined and affordable educational opportunities that target high demand occupations are vital to ensure that we have a strong talent pipeline in place. Online universities provide an important educational opportunity—particularly in rural areas.

As originally introduced, the bill would have put up barriers for some accredited online institutions to operate in the state and GNDC was opposed. However, the House Education Committee amended the bill to provide a fair, reasonable, and enforceable exemption to the requirement that all online universities have to participate in a national clearing house (NC-SARA).

In its current form HB 1064 provides a balanced approach. Having a defined exemption that still allows for the university system to gain administrative efficiencies provides the type of responsive, common-sense regulatory environment that GNDC supports.

We respectfully ask the committee to support the amended bill. Thank you for your consideration.