

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 2308

PRESENTED BY JAMES SCHMIDT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTH DAKOTA STATE ELECTRICAL BOARD

Chairman Roers, Members of the State & Local Government Committee:

I am James Schmidt, Executive Director of the North Dakota State Electrical Board (NDSEB) appearing for the board in opposition to Senate Bill 2308. The board opposed Sections 6-8 of this bill simply because it believes it is unnecessary as applied to the NDSEB.

As you are likely aware, several bills have been proposed, both this session and in past sessions, but have been defeated or turned into a study when the facts of what individual occupational and licensing boards do become fully known.

Our office was directly involved with SB 2249 from the 2022-2023 legislative session which ordered a study to be performed by the Labor Commissioner. Of the 42 boards and commissions plus the Board of Law Examiners, the Labor Commissioner selected six agency directors to be on his Occupational Licensure Advisory Committee (OLCA), and I was one of those individuals. The Labor Commissioner's final report reflected problem areas, but our board was not one of them. It seems this bill will cover the same ground.

We have heard no complaints about the board's licensure process. The board processes over 1,000 applications for licensure each year which are reviewed and processed on a weekly schedule. The board also schedules two days each month for licensing examinations.

Our state currently is a member of the National Electrical Reciprocal Alliance (NERA) which has 19 member states. To be a member of this group the state must have certain minimum licensing requirements. The purpose of our membership in this group is to allow ND electricians to move between states, and allows an extremely streamlined process for electricians seeking to move or practice here. Someone entitled to reciprocity based on holding a license in a NERA state is routinely approved within five days of receipt of their application.

Some states and other jurisdictions do not have licensure or have minimal requirements that make them ineligible for immediate reciprocity. The board also has an expedited path to licensure for these individuals. Individuals with experience in such states and jurisdictions are allowed to temporarily practice and take a placement exam which puts them on the path to full licensure. The board strongly believes its licensure process imposes the minimum burden necessary to protect ND citizens from both life safety concerns and financial harm from unqualified electricians.

The board has also taken significant steps to address future workforce development. With the statutory authority provided by the legislature in SB 2056 in 2019, the board initiated a scholarship program which provides North Dakota student apprentices \$500 per semester to assist with books and tools. Since this program began, scholarships have been provided to 2,156 student apprentice electricians, who are the future of ND's electrical trade.

The board also supports and attends "Market Place for Kids" and other events across the state to enlighten elementary and middle school students about the electrical trade. At these events, we assist these

students in performing interesting hands-on electrical exercises that hopefully will spark a lifelong interest in the trade.

The NDSEB is a specialized board overseeing a technical industry. At its core, the board's concern is safeguarding the residents of ND from electrical hazards and financial harm. It is always on the lookout for more efficient means and methods to streamline its procedures, while also maintaining that core function. We therefore urge a do not pass vote on SB 2308 or exempt/remove North Dakota State Electrical Board from this bill.

We thank the Committee for hearing our concerns.