

Testimony on House Bill 1220
Honorable Members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee,

I am Dr. Mary Dockter, Dean of the St. Gianna School of Health Sciences at the University of Mary. I stand before you today in opposition to House Bill 1220, which seeks to reduce the general education requirements for in-demand professions. With 36 years of experience as a physical therapist, physical therapy educator, and academic administrator, I now lead a robust school offering 13 undergraduate and 15 graduate degrees in high-demand fields such as nursing, respiratory therapy, radiology technology, athletic training, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology. I am well-versed in recognizing the critical need for well-prepared healthcare professionals in North Dakota and beyond, and I care deeply about the health and well-being of our state.

While the list of high-demand professions is substantial, I urge you to consider the long-term impacts that limiting general educational requirements will have on both patients and providers. General education, rooted in the liberal arts, fosters a depth and breadth of learning that is more relevant than ever and is critical to the future of health and healthcare in America. Our world is rapidly growing more complex. A study in 2011 estimated that medical knowledge doubled every 50 years in 1950, every 7 years in 1980, every 3.5 years in 2010, and every 73 days in 2020. This shocking statistic means that what was learned in the first three years of medical school will be just 6% of what is known at the end of the decade from 2010 to 2020. Imagine that statistic now and ponder what it will be in a few years as developments such as artificial intelligence are just now in their infancy stages. It is critical that students learn how to learn, as opposed to being limited to technical skill development, as information learned now will be obsolete in the near future. Healthcare educators are looking to the humanities to help students transform knowledge into clinical wisdom, critically think, tolerate ambiguity, problem-solve, analyze ethical challenges, and communicate effectively and with sensitivity to optimize the health of patients and entire communities in our increasingly diverse and complex world.

My esteemed colleague, Dr. Billie Madler, will provide well-thought-out and research-based testimony on the impact of a bachelor's degree in nursing. Similarly, in respiratory therapy, where graduates can enter practice with either an associate or bachelor's degree, a 2023 study demonstrated that patients who received more than 85% of their care from providers with advanced training had improved discharge outcomes compared to those whose care was provided by providers with associate degrees. Studies demonstrate that educational preparation matters. I encourage you to carefully review and listen to testimony and evidence that supports a holistic education that provides rigorous professional preparation grounded in the liberal arts.

In addition to my concerns related to adverse patient outcomes, I have pragmatic concerns related to licensure and accreditation. Nearly all of our healthcare programs undergo rigorous accreditation processes, including submission of annual self-study reports and periodic site visits. For an applicant to sit for a required licensure examination, most state boards require successful graduation from an

accredited education program. A snapshot of programmatic accreditation standards indicates an expectation that students have a foundation in the liberal arts:

Occupational Therapy Accreditation

ACOTE Standard B.1.0: Program content must be based on a broad foundation in the liberal arts and sciences. A strong foundation in the biological, physical, social, and behavioral sciences supports an understanding of occupation across the lifespan.

Nursing Accreditation

- **CCNE Criterion and Standard for Accreditation Standard III Key Element III-F:** Baccalaureate curricula build on a foundation of the arts, sciences, and humanities. Baccalaureate degree programs demonstrate that knowledge from courses in the arts, sciences, and humanities is incorporated into nursing practice.

Radiology Therapy Accreditation

- **JRCERT Standard 4.2:** At a minimum, the curriculum should promote qualities necessary for students/graduates to practice competently, make ethical decisions, assess situations, provide appropriate patient care, communicate effectively, and keep abreast of current advancements within the profession. Expansion of the curricular content beyond the minimum is required of programs at the bachelor's degree or higher levels.

In Representative Motschenbacher's written testimony presented to the House Committee in January, he wrote, "Furthermore, and maybe one of the most beneficial things about this bill, is that it is likely that other states may not recognize these degrees and thus, many of the students would likely stay in ND to work where they are accepted rather than transfer to another state." This statement points out the alarming reality that adoption of this bill would put students in a situation in which completion of their degree in a North Dakota institution may limit them to North Dakota licensure only. Outside of the questionable ethics of this practice, I envision an outward wave of North Dakota high school students choosing out-of-state institutions to pursue their degrees, as well as out-of-state students avoiding North Dakota.

There is an undeniable shortage of workforce in certain professions. Compressing degrees to 90 credits and significantly limiting general education requirements is not the answer. Faculty and administrators from both secondary and higher education, along with partnering employers, have been and will continue to create innovative solutions to positively impact workforce needs, such as year-round academic programs, dual credit opportunities, collaborative scholarships and programmatic discounts, and paid internships. While there are challenges, we envision opportunities that ensure a high-quality and excellent workforce in the future.

References:

- Densen P. Challenges and opportunities facing medical education. *Trans Am Clin Climatol Assoc.* 2011;122:48-58. PMID: 21686208; PMCID: PMC3116346.
- Kaur R, Geistkemper A, Mitra R, Becker EA. RT education and COVID-19 pneumonia discharge quality. *Canadian Journal of Respiratory Therapy.* 2023;59:190-203. doi:10.29390/001c.87641.