



Senate Workforce Committee

SB 2270

February 13, 2025

Chairman Wobbema and Committee Members, I'm Donna Thronson and I serve as Communications Director of the North Dakota Medical Association. The North Dakota Medical Association is the professional membership organization for North Dakota physicians, residents, and medical students. NDMA supports SB 2270.

NDMA strives to increase access to medical care in the state, and SB 2270 will help achieve this by promoting access to care by deploying the expertise of experienced international physicians.

As acute physician shortages continue to be a central concern for North Dakota and NDMA seeks out and advocates for new ways to make health care more accessible for all populations. We believe North Dakota should seize the opportunity to integrate qualified international physicians into the highest areas of need to help address the state's current and future provider shortages. These are experienced physicians who have been educated, trained, and obtained licensure or its equivalent outside of the United States. They have practiced medicine independently abroad, often for many years. However, international physicians face substantial barriers to healthcare workforce reentry in the United States. These obstacles include having to repeat years of postgraduate clinical training

(residency). Moreover, international physicians are largely unable to secure positions in residency programs because slots are severely limited and are designed for recent medical school graduates. Nationally, 22% of internationally trained immigrant physicians are underemployed, and 14.7% are working in jobs outside their field of training if not outside of health care altogether.

To address physician shortages and increase healthcare delivery, a growing number of states have made significant progress in developing alternative pathways to practice for international physicians.

SB 2270 would set North Dakota on such a path by allowing qualified international physicians who have been licensed or authorized to practice medicine outside of the United States to be issued a provisional license to practice medicine under the employment of a participating healthcare provider operating in our state. To be eligible, qualified candidates would need to complete all examination and credentialing requirements that are currently required for entry into a residency program and also have an offer of full-time employment from a participating facility. Program assessment and evaluation criteria would be developed and/or approved by the Board of Medicine to ensure program participants are qualified and meet appropriate standards to ensure patient safety and quality of care. This provisional license converts to a full medical license automatically after three years of active practice in this state.

NDMA recognizes that this legislation is not a perfect solution. For example, there are skills learned in residencies that are unique to the U.S. healthcare system. Therefore, we suggest that a mentorship or proctor requirement be added to the bill. A supervisor to

aid and monitor the international physician for a period of time, such as 2,000 hours of practice. The other suggested change would be to allow the Board to verify the training and the mentorship prior to the full license being granted.

NDMA has no objection to any of proposed amendments put forth by the Board to assure the international physician is competent to practice in North Dakota.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. I would be happy to answer any questions.