



2023 Senate Bill 2151
Senate Workforce Development Committee
Senator Michael Wobbema, Chairman
January 26, 2023

Chairman Wobbema and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee, I am Tim Blasl, President of the North Dakota Hospital Association (NDHA). I testify in support of Senate Bill 2151 and ask that you give the bill a **Do Pass** recommendation.

Hospitals support this bill because it helps address our number one challenge: workforce. Hospitals are challenged to find workers in nearly every health care employee group – not just physicians, advanced practice providers, and nurses but also lab techs, surgical techs, medical imaging techs, housekeeping, dietary, and many others. The health care provider shortage is not just an inconvenience, it is a public health crisis that was building even before the COVID-19 pandemic. More health care workers are leaving the field due to burnout and retirement, thereby aggravating an already critical shortage of workers.

To give an idea of how big this challenge is just in nursing, NDHA conducted a survey last summer. It showed that there were 1,326 nurse openings throughout the state. And hospitals contracted with staffing agencies for another 717 nurses. In total, hospitals have over 2,000 nurse openings. The lack of nurses challenges our hospitals in both the rural and urban areas. They are increasingly paying higher wages to keep and recruit enough staff. Urban hospital wages have increased \$382 million since 2019, mainly due to contract labor. The escalating cost of contracted nursing staff and the upward pressure it puts on wages is not sustainable.

Hospitals have had to focus on how they recruit and retain staff, which is generally through traditional methods such as bonuses and loan forgiveness programs but, while we do more to invest in creating the next generation of health care workers, we believe recruiting qualified immigrants is a complimentary and effective short-term approach to help alleviate the pressure. We need to recruit workers from other countries because we simply do not have enough people here to fill the staffing shortages. Hospitals work with

immigration offices, attorneys, and vendors to recruit international staff. The cost to recruit ranges from \$10,000 - \$20,000 per individual, depending on the country. Not all hospitals can afford this. We believe a state office of immigration and a forgivable loan program would make this process more efficient, accessible, and affordable for hospitals.

I do not have the magical answer to fill all these openings but passing this bill would be a step in the right direction. Please give the bill a **Do Pass** recommendation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be glad to answer any questions.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim Blasl, President
North Dakota Hospital Association