



**2023 Senate Bill 2344**  
**House Finance and Taxation Committee**  
**Representative Craig Headland, Chairman**  
**March 7, 2023**

Chairman Headland and members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee, my name is Tim Blasl. I am the President of the North Dakota Hospital Association (NDHA) which represents hospitals and health systems across the state. I testify in support of engrossed Senate Bill 2344 and ask that you give it a **Do Pass** recommendation.

Hospitals support the bill because it helps with our number one challenge: workforce. The scarcity of nurses is especially challenging for our hospitals in both rural and urban areas. To give an idea of how big this challenge is specifically 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, North Dakota hospitals have over 2,000 nurse openings. The lack of nurses means hospitals must turn to contract staffing agencies to fill the gaps. The cost of contracted nursing staff and the upward pressure it puts on wages, however, is not sustainable. Urban hospital wages have increased \$382 million since 2019, mainly due to contract labor.

I do not have the magical answer to fill all these openings but adding registered nurses to the list of health care professionals that may qualify for student loan repayment matching funds through this program will be helpful in solving the nurse shortage. To the extent that we can make it easier for health care professionals to become trained and ready to work in North Dakota, it helps hospitals provide the care that patients need close to home. This bill would help recruit and retain health care workers in North Dakota if those workers know they will not be saddled with student loan debt in order to get the necessary training.

Please give the bill a **Do Pass** recommendation. Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim Blasl, President  
North Dakota Hospital Association