



McKenzie County

Job Development Authority

1 February 1, 2021

2 Chairman Delzer and Committee members:

3 We are seeking your support for the career academy concept included in HB 1431. Since 2017,
4 the McKenzie County Skills Initiative through the McKenzie County Job Development Authority
5 (JDA) has brought together industry leadership, secondary education, TrainND Northwest,
6 Williston State College, and the University of Mary to discuss ways to increase local training and
7 education. Some training that doesn't require specialized equipment has been able to take
8 place in the Rough Rider Center already, but more specialized training requires equipment that
9 needs to be permanently or semi-permanently affixed into a dedicated classroom.

10 In a 2019 community survey, 69% of McKenzie County respondents listed "Primary, Technical,
11 & Post-Secondary Education Opportunities for Students, Employers, & Employees" as an
12 Important or Extremely Important economic development strategy for our community to
13 embrace. With that information, in Fall 2020, the McKenzie County JDA in coordination with
14 ICON Architects conducted a Phase I feasibility study which encompassed a series of
15 conversations with area employers and educators to better understand the workforce demand of
16 local employers. The results of that study found that Automation, Nursing and the Trades
17 showed the greatest potential for us to pursue.

18 This past fall, a local company began a welding course to 10 displaced workers. That has gone
19 well and they are looking at how to expand. Also this fall Williston State College, in partnership
20 with McKenzie County Healthcare Systems, began providing Practical Nurse training in
21 McKenzie County. This was capped at 8 students due to resource constraints—but there were
22 14 who applied. In January 2021, the JDA hosted a meeting with local petroleum automation
23 employers and Williston State College where the impetus landed on the design of a 15-20-week
24 automation training course. The goal is for this to launch by Fall 2021. Students who
25 successfully complete the training course will be in a much better position to begin careers with
26 our local employers given the skills gained in the program.

27 Our local employers report higher workforce retention rates with "home-grown" employees. That
28 is why we have been pushing hard for local training opportunities and feel that a career
29 academy is in everyone's best interest. With the majority of our state-funded higher education
30 institutions a 3-7 hour drive away, our employers are at a disadvantage when it comes to
31 recruiting them back home. To help weather market fluctuations, the JDA has been working
32 hard to diversify our economy. Advancing nimble career and technical education is definitely a
33 part of that diversification strategy. We feel this funding would accelerate this work greatly that
34 would benefit our students, workforce, employers, and ultimately the tax collections of North
35 Dakota.

36 Thank you for your consideration.

37 Daniel Stenberg
38 McKenzie County Job Development Authority Executive Director