



March 17, 2021

Members of the North Dakota
SENATE FINANCE AND TAX COMMITTEE

Support for HB 1431 in its ORIGINAL Version – Dr. Denise Jonas, Director of Career and Technical Education

Chairperson Bell and members of the Senate Finance and Tax Committee. My name is Denise Jonas, Director of Career and Technical Education Center, supporting CTE programs in Central Cass, Fargo, Northern Cass and West Fargo Public Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of the original version of HB 1431. I respectfully ask that you preserve the original version with a “DUE PASS” recommendation to honor funding earmarked for Career Workforce Academies.

As Director of CTE, I am approached almost daily by business and industry inquiring about opportunities to connect with our K-12 teachers and students. These requests are not limited to high school students but extend to elementary and middle school learners. With our State’s low unemployment, workforce demands, and natural employee attrition, K12-business partnerships are viewed as a mechanism to create company awareness, expose students to future careers, and provide experiential learning.

In Cass County, we are pleased to offer a variety of career and technical education programs and pathways in our current K-12 educational systems, yet in a 2018 Career Workforce Academy Program and Curriculum study, it revealed program gaps in agriculture education, construction, manufacturing, and transportation. In our region, there is also a growing demand in medical careers, information technology, transportation, and biomedical technologies influenced by Sanford Health, Microsoft, and Aldevron. Despite K-12 efforts, schools are challenged to meet local school district demands, along with workforce demands, without collaborative efforts to scale, support, and grow opportunities through a hub for coordination and expanded learning such as the CWA.

In our region, Career Workforce Academy (CWA) collaborative discussions began in 2016. Sparked by a shared vision to create a systemic pipeline; the CWA is a collective network of business partners, K-12 schools, post-secondary leaders, the cities of Fargo and West Fargo, the Cass County Commission, FM Economic Development, FMWF Chamber of Commerce, and local legislators. All driven to improve education, and the local and State’s economy.

Over the past five years our concerted efforts have moved a vision to action with committed stakeholder and we are ready to deliver workforce training career education programming!

- 2017-2018 - Phase I – Career Workforce Academy Strategic Plan complete (attached)
- 2018-2019 – Phase II - K-14 Program Priorities and Curriculum audit complete (attached)
- 2019-2020 - Fundraising, operational budget and governance planning to support Strategic Plan
- 2020-2021 – Phase III - architecture selection, design input, renderings, bids, and groundbreaking
- 2021-2022 – Phase IV – Build and program development for opening Fall 2022

As one of the fastest growing communities in North Dakota and serving as a diverse economic engine for the state, workforce development is critical Cass County. Manufacturing to information technology, agriculture to medical sciences, entrepreneurship to the trades, technical training is at the forefront of our discussions. Magnifying this need is projected regional growth, along with 8,000 jobs anticipated for the Fargo Diversion and Amazon alone. With this current need and anticipated demand, I respectfully ask for your support of the original version of HB 1431 to leverage career and technical education and Career Workforce Academies to create a systemic workforce pipeline for the state and future of North Dakota!