



March 12, 2021

Senate Government & Veterans Affairs Committee

HB 1166

Katie Ralston, Director of Workforce Division, ND Department of Commerce

Hello, Chairman Veda and members of the Senate and Government & Veteran Affairs Committee. My name is Katie Ralston, and I have served as the director of the workforce division at the North Dakota Department of Commerce since January 2020. In my role, I also have the pleasure of serving as the director of the industry-led Workforce Development Council. I'm here to share some data related to concepts addressed in HB 1166.

In the 66th Legislative Assembly, SB 2306 included that licensing boards and commissions must submit a report to the Department of Commerce by August 2020. We leveraged a subcommittee of the Workforce Development Council made up of legislators and a cross-functional group of representatives of those affected by North Dakota's occupational licensing framework, including the business community and populations with barriers to employment, such as those with criminal backgrounds, displaced workers, and the military. The goal of this workgroup was to remove unnecessary barriers to employment while preserving the health and safety of North Dakota citizens and promoting competition. To accomplish this, the workgroup studied North Dakota's schema for occupational licensing in order to develop a thorough understanding of licensing in our state; discover best practices; engage licensing boards and commissions; and identify the best path for reform. Finally, to fulfill the task of collecting a report from each licensing board required to comply with SB 2306, we contracted with the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR). Over the course of seven months, this effort revealed the impact of previous legislation, and uncovered unique and effective practices already being utilized by our boards, while also helping us identify opportunities for future refinement.

For example, one of the most interesting findings was the practice of designated authority, where a board appoints one person from the board (30%) or a staff member (61%) to process routine license applications. A combined 91% of our licensing boards engage in this practice, which expedites the license application review process. Although there is a wide range in

application processing timeframes spanning from same-day approval to six months, the average timeframe is 18 days.

We also learned that many of North Dakota's licensing boards are already promoting geographic mobility either through informal policies designed to expedite applications for out-of-state applicants or to recognize out-of-state licenses (41%); formal reciprocity agreements with other states (20%); endorsement provisions (41%); and interstate compacts.

Combining the findings related to expedited application processing and geographic mobility, it's no surprise that of the 58 military spouses who identified themselves as such on their license applications from summer 2019 to June 2020, only one received a provisional license or temporary permit as his/her application could not be processed in 30 days.

My hope is that this brief overview helps you understand what's currently being done by our licensing boards to accommodate applicants. I appreciate the opportunity to share what we've learned throughout the last year and am happy to answer any questions.