

Good afternoon, Chairman Schaible and members of the Education Committee. My name is Bobbie Will, and I am the Primary Care Office Director at the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 2143.

In 1994, the North Dakota State Legislature established student loan repayments for certain health care professionals to increase the number of providers in areas of the state with defined health professional shortages. Eligible providers include physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, certified nurse midwives and most recently behavioral health professionals. Individuals apply after they have secured employment in a rural, underserved area and are licensed in the state. Loan repayment serves as an incentive to recruit and retain providers in these areas of need.

The Health Professional Student Loan Repayment Program has been successful in addressing workforce shortages. Last year we had 91 physicians, advanced practice providers, and behavioral health providers apply for the health care professional loan repayment program and awarded funding to 16 providers.

Currently, 43-12.3-06 requires equal payments be distributed over a five-year period equaling a maximum amount. There have been circumstances where an awardees remaining loans are less than what is required to be paid

out over the five years leaving unspent funding that cannot be utilized. The proposed amendments in Senate Bill 2143 will allow flexibility for the State Health Council to award additional providers if a provider's loan amount is less than the maximum amount allowed per profession. In 2018, the Department of Health could have awarded funding to at least two additional providers should the proposed language change have been in effect.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.