

March 6, 2023

Chair Champion
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3401
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Champion and Members of the Senate Jobs and Economic Development Committee:

On behalf of the Southeast Minnesota Workforce Board, I am writing in support of SF2473, a bill that will add much needed funding to the Minnesota Youth Program (MYP). MYP is integral to serving young people in our area who face barriers to education and employment opportunities.

In the past eleven years we have received less than a 5% increase in funds. In 2022 WDI served a total of 330 youth through the Minnesota Youth Program, at a cost of \$855 per enrolled youth. Our current MYP budget allows for a total Career Planner FTE of 2.6. Should we receive an increase in funding our first step would be to adequately staff our region. The additional funds would allow us to hire five more youth career planners for a total FTE of 7.6 at a cost of \$532,000 per year. These Career Planners would focus specifically on our more rural areas, helping us serve those youth we haven't been sufficiently able to serve in the past due strictly to capacity.

The second thing we would do is invest in virtual reality technology that brings hands on career exploration out of the metro and large city areas, and directly into the hands of our rural students. At a yearly cost of \$50,000 we would receive headsets for each Career Planner to use with their students.

Doubling our enrollment goal would be feasible, as would increasing our work experience budget allowing youth to participate in these priceless, hands on, mentor led opportunities. The cost of additional work experiences and Outreach Staff to help facilitate them would run \$100,000. (\$65,000 WEX, \$35,000 towards Outreach Staff).

We would create a temporary (1 year) position to convene regional youth resources. This person would be tasked with identifying, cataloging resources, and convening of all youth serving entities in the region, at a cost of \$70,000. This initiative would increase our effectiveness as a region and reduce the chance of duplication of services.

We would provide additional outreach to schools in the form of presentations, class sessions, etc. and increase the amount of support services we are able to provide students.

The increase would also allow us to create a line-item in the budget for training support for our youth that are continuing into short-term, post-secondary education: \$80,000 would provide scholarships for 10 students.

We also support increasing the age of eligibility from 16-21 to 16-24. This mirrors other youth workforce development programs' age of eligibility and will allow greater flexibility for co-enrollment to leverage multiple funding streams.

We appreciate Senator Mohamed's leadership on this bill and encourage the committee to support investment in youth programming via the Minnesota Youth Program.

Sincerely,



Jinny Rietmann
Executive Director
Workforce Development, Inc.
Southeast Minnesota Workforce Board