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**Testimony of Support Senate Bill 2331
Finance & Tax Committee
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Good morning Chairman Cook and members of Senate Finance and Tax Committee. My name is Veronica Zietz (#99); I am the Executive Director at The Arc of Bismarck and I'm here today representing both The Arc of Bismarck and The Arc of Cass County. The Arc is an organization that provides education and advocacy to people with disabilities to foster empowerment and full inclusion in the community.

The Arc strongly supports Senate Bill 2331, because it would provide employers with a tax credit for hiring and permanently employing individuals with disabilities. Employing individuals with disabilities is a big issue in North Dakota and it is about to get even bigger; with an economic boom affecting much of the workforce in our state it may be time for North Dakota to tap the last untouched labor pool. The US Census Bureau found that in December of 2010 the unemployment rate for people with a disability was 14.3, an increase since December of 2009. The unemployment rate of people with a disability is far higher than unemployment rates of their counterparts with no disability. It is time to address this historically huge rate of disparity in employment for individuals with a disability and I believe this bill can help do that. By offering an incentive in the form of a tax credit employers will be more willing to hire and provide long-term employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This bill offers a tiered credit over a three year period that will help subsidize the training period for new employees with a disability.

This bill will incentivize hiring people with a disability by leveling out the learning curve during the training period, but it will also encourage businesses to look beyond stereotypes and to hire perfectly capable people with a disability. Often people with a disability are viewed unfavorably for employment and many businesses haven't considered them to be a part of the labor pool. However, this is completely incorrect people with disabilities are often loyal and hardworking, and perhaps it is legislation such as this that will persuade employers to give individuals with disabilities a fair chance in the workplace.

I would like to tell you a bit about my experience as an employer of people with disabilities. The Arc of Bismarck operates a Thrift Store which employs multiple people with and without disabilities. Fair compensation and an integrated work setting have benefited my employees with disabilities immensely. These individuals are frequently my most reliable workers and once hired they finally have a chance to support themselves by earning a fair wage and this limits their reliance on governments systems. Employing people with disabilities also benefits others in the workplace. The integrated environment offers everyone a chance to learn from each other. I believe individuals with disabilities are a very valuable resource to any business and passing this bill could provide many businesses in North Dakota with the necessary encouragement to give individuals with disabilities an opportunity for long term employment.

The passage of this bill would result in the increased employment of individuals with disabilities and would empower them to become self-sufficient and further integrate into our community. Please support your local businesses and the many individuals with disabilities that could benefit from this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.