



March 15th, 2021

Chair Monson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Gracie Lian, and I am the current President of the North Dakota Student Association (NDSA). The NDSA is an organization that is directly funded through a small student fee paid by all students attending North Dakota University System (NDUS) institutions, and our organization is tasked with representing and advocating for students across all eleven of North Dakota's public institutions.

I am here today to voice the **NDSA's historical and continued support for the Challenge Fund Grant and our strong opposition to the amendment in Section 2.** The specified amendment would add wording to section 15-10-48 of the North Dakota Century Code that would make an institution's ability to receive Challenge Fund Grant dollars from the state conditional upon that institution removing any ties with "any person or organization that performs, or promotes the performance of, an abortion unless the abortion is necessary to prevent the death of the woman, and not participating or sponsoring any program producing, distributing, publishing, disseminating, endorsing, or approving materials of any type or from any organization, that between normal childbirth and abortion, do not give preference, encouragement, and support to normal childbirth."

The NDSA General Assembly met on February 19th, 2021 and passed NDSA-19-2021¹, "A Resolution Opposing an Amendment to SB 2030." In this resolution the NDSA outlines our concerns with making Challenge Fund Grant money, which is used for student scholarships and educational technologies on campuses, conditional upon state stipulations and legislative policies that are highly polarized and political.

More importantly, however, I would like to point out the impact this could have on the affordability of higher education in North Dakota. "Since the program's inception, \$61.8 million in state dollars has been leveraged with private donations for a total investment of \$192.7 million. Of the total, \$115.7 million, or 60%, was dedicated to increasing student scholarships. \$21.4 was used to expand educational infrastructure, while the remaining dollars were directed to endowed chairs, technology, and research." This information is from the NDUS and was presented by Tammy Dolan and David Krebsbach in earlier testimony, and I believe those numbers are significant enough to bear repeating.

The \$115,700,000 used for student scholarships is an incredibly important and irreplaceable aspect of the Challenge Fund Grant program. Scholarships are often what makes higher education attainable for students – especially low-income and first-generation students. In an educational system such as the NDUS, which prides itself on its affordability for students, every single dollar counts. Especially when that dollar creates a 2:1 match from private donors.

A lack of financial support for students results in higher student debt, lower grades, fewer opportunities for extracurricular involvement, and higher drop-out rates². Studies have even found that nearly half of higher education students are food insecure and go hungry in the United States³. Many of our

¹ <https://nds.a.ndus.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/02/NDSA-19-2021-.pdf>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7450237/#:~:text=THE%20IMPORTANCE%20OF%20HIGHER%20EDUCATION&text=A%20growing%20patchwork%20of%20recent,12%20%2C%2013%20than%20their%20counterparts.>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/nyregion/hunger-college-food-insecurity.html>



institutions have accessible, well-run food pantries. However, the reality is that these food pantries have to exist or some of our students would have to make the decision between continuing their education or going hungry. In a recent NDSU survey, one in three NDSU students reported that they had experienced food insecurity.⁴ Challenge Fund Grant money can be, and likely often has been, a determinant of student success, graduation rates, student debt, and students' ability to feed themselves.

The amendment made in Section 2 is so broad that it could be conceivably applied to all institutions, meaning higher education students all across the state would be impacted. For certain universities it would be an incredibly difficult, if not impossible, task to meet the stipulations of the amendment as written. Colleges of nursing, UND's School of Medicine and Health Sciences, and even relationships with student health centers on campuses could conceivably cause an institution to forfeit their Challenge Grant funding if they wish to continue to provide healthcare services or standardized and required curricula on campuses.

Students will be hurt and miss out on educational and financial opportunities if this amendment is allowed to remain in the bill. The more restrictions and stipulations that are placed on Challenge Fund money, the fewer people that will participate in providing private donations. If kept, the amendment will impede the ability of our universities to fundraise. Since the Challenge Fund was first implemented, NDUS institutions have met increasingly larger fundraising goals and continually broken fundraising records. The NDSA would hate to see that progress stop, and for students to lose educational opportunities, because of this amendment.

The Challenge Fund Grant is an incredibly important part of North Dakota's support for higher education in our state. Students' lives are directly impacted in positive ways because of this program, whether that be through new classroom technologies or scholarships that make their education affordable. The success of the program would be endangered and restricted if the bill were to be passed as it is currently written.

Therefore, the North Dakota Student Association **urges the legislature to remove the amendment in Section 2**, relating to educational and organizational requirements, **and issues our support for the original version of SB 2030**. At this time, the NDSA takes no stance on the amendment that would include the University of Jamestown and the University of Mary in receiving Challenge Grant funding. We only remind the legislature that NDUS institutions have a charge to serve the state of North Dakota, while the private institutions have no such affiliation.

Sincerely,

Gracie Lian

President

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⁴ <https://www.valleynewslive.com/2020/11/02/north-dakota-state-university-launches-program-to-reduce-food-insecurity-among-students/>