

**HB 1003**

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Chair Bekkedahl and Members of the Committee: My name is Christopher Scott, and I am the current President of the North Dakota Student Association and I am here today in support of HB 1003 and to bring in student perspective on HB 1003.

The North Dakota Student Association (NDSA) is a student organization established in 1969 dedicated to ensuring that students have a voice at the table in policy that affects Higher Education. We consist of delegates from each of the 11 public institutions meeting monthly to engage students in ND Higher Education policy. Our mission is to empower students, create collaboration between the student bodies of the North Dakota public universities, and to give a student perspective on higher education policy.

Earlier in the legislative session, after this bill had its first hearing, the NDSA passed [NDSA-12-2223](#), which is a resolution that supports this bill. One of the biggest decisions for college students themselves is where to attend and how to pay for their education? North Dakota has historically had the lowest tuition rates in the country for years thanks to the management of the North Dakota University System (NDUS), and ample funding from the state legislature. Many students from other states and other countries come to North Dakota for an affordable, quality college education. Therefore, it is important to keep tuition affordable to students. Maintaining affordable tuition for students not only brings more students to attend colleges in North Dakota, but also supports the state economically. Additionally, once students graduate, they tend to settle in the area that they graduate from, ultimately bringing more workforce to North Dakota, and thereby more funds that North Dakota can then use going forward. It's a positive investment.

While talking about the NDUS budget, one of the things that was brought up frequently during my in the campus visits was that the University System is operating at the bare bones, and so with more funds to distribute in this legislative session than any before, I would ask the legislators to support the current proposed allocation or to increase it. Higher Education is a positive investment, the more you put in it, the more you receive in exchange, making it an effective way North Dakota can address its workforce needs, particularly in critical areas, such as teachers and nurses.

One way the legislature can do this is by reevaluating staff and faculty salaries. In today's world, inflation has impacted everything, from buildings costs to the cost of living and salaries. The Universities' proposal going into the legislative session is a 6 percent increase in salary this next year, and 4 percent increase the following year. With many sources reporting a 7 percent inflation in 2022 alone, this piece of the budget proposal is critical to keeping quality staff and faculty in North Dakota, which directly affects the quality of education the NDUS can provide. While the current proposed raises are a step in the right direction, and I support these, I would also support the legislature considering increasing these percentages to accurately reflect inflation rates, should budget allow.

Every legislative session, the NDSA passes a resolution stating its legislative priorities for that session. That resolution this year is [NDSA-09-2223](#). Some proposed allocations in HB 1003 align directly with the legislative priorities we have established for this session. The first and foremost is the Behavioral Health Initiative. This initiative is 3.6-million-dollar proposal that adds 12 Full Time Counselors, and One Part Time Counselors positions across the NDUS institutions. Mental health is a significant indicator of whether a student will succeed in college or not. In my personal experiences, many of my friends dropped out of college their first and second years due to personal mental health issues. Worse, there are students that have considered or have taken their own lives due to mental health issues within the last few years, a couple making headlines. There were also a several instances, particularly during COVID-19 that when students were using the counseling services that universities provide, there was a severe backlog, and for that student to be seen, they might have to wait weeks or months. This initiative would directly help with expanding the universities capacity at addressing student mental health needs.

There are also several investments that create scholarships in areas that ensure student receive education preparing them to enter workforces in emerging technologies, and increase access to student financial aid for NDUS students, both of which are NDSA legislative priorities. With HB 1003 specifically, what is proposed is a 24 million dollar innovation program, 10 million dollars for Education Scholarships for the Energy Workforce, a Veteran Program, the Dakota Digital Academy, and the ND AC/CTE Scholarships. All of these reduce barriers for students, and increase access to an affordable education. Again, one of the most important factors for students going to college is where to attend and how to afford the education.

There has also been additional scholarships and grant programs added to this bill, and the NDSA passed a resolution, [NDSA-08-2223](#) supporting many of these. One of the most notable is the ND Challenge Grant. This particular grant is an invaluable tool for universities to attract outside donors with a matching rate. During the last biennium, the Challenge Grant had 11 million dollars allocated to it, and going through the legislative session, the current proposal for the next biennium is 33 million dollars. The NDSA, passed a resolution, [NDSA-07-2223](#), during its November 2022 General Assembly meeting, specifically supporting the ND Challenge Grant to express its importance to the NDUS.

There have been some additions that the NDSA find concerning as well. In Section 22 of the bill, a proposal has been made that a President of an institution under control of the State Board of Higher Education may adopt policies, procedures and directives for the institution without any authoritative control from faculty and others through shared governance. This puts too much power in the hands of the presidents and takes it away from the faculty and the consumers of Higher Education, its students. Back when the United States was originally founded, the founding fathers worried that later on, one entity may gain too much power over other entities by gaining enough military power to dominate others. In order to prevent this from occurring, the founding fathers separated power among the three branches of power, the Legislative Branch, the Executive Branch and the Judicial Branch. Balance of power is important and if one entity such holds too much power, that may lead the organization in a direction that its members do not want, and so the NDSA does not support this amendment to HB 1003.