

Support of HB 1064
Senate Education Committee
March 12, 2025
Kevin Black, Member, State Board of Higher Education

Honorable members of the Senate Education Committee,

As a member of the State Board of Higher Education, I respectfully submit this testimony of support for House Bill 1064, which is designed to establish a level playing field for educational institutions and protect North Dakota students from financial and educational risks. The bill encompasses several key provisions that I believe are essential for upholding high academic standards, financial stability, and the integrity of distance education.

House Bill 1064 ensures that out-of-state institutions are held to the same academic and financial standards as those within the North Dakota University System (NDUS). This is a crucial step in maintaining the quality of education provided to our students. Specifically, the bill leverages the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) membership as a nationally recognized benchmark for student consumer protection. This membership guarantees that institutions meet consistent standards to offer distance education, thereby fostering transparency and accountability.

One of the most significant concerns is the potential financial distress faced by institutions receiving Title IV federal student aid. Despite this aid, many institutions have encountered heightened oversight, lawsuits, and even sudden closures, leaving students burdened with debt and without a degree. HB 1064 aims to mitigate these risks by enforcing a robust regulatory framework that ensures only institutions with proven financial stability and accredited programs can operate within North Dakota. This framework is instrumental in reducing the chances of fraud, misrepresentation, and predatory practices.

NC-SARA membership provides a standardized process for approving distance education providers, ensuring consistency and clarity across states. This standardization is vital for maintaining educational integrity and protecting student consumers. Without such benchmarks, students may enroll in institutions with inadequate oversight, leading to poor educational outcomes, unrecognized credentials, or loss of tuition if institutions close unexpectedly.

Currently, NDUS staff spend up to one full day per week reviewing out-of-state institution applications—a process that is both time-consuming and unnecessary given that NC-SARA membership provides a reliable and efficient vetting system. By adopting the NC-SARA requirement, NDUS can streamline operations, redirect valuable staff time to initiatives that directly support North Dakota students and institutions, and deliver more efficient government to the taxpayers.

In conclusion, House Bill 1064 represents a comprehensive approach to protecting the educational landscape in North Dakota. By establishing rigorous standards for out-of-state institutions, protecting students from financial and educational risks, and strengthening consumer protections, we can ensure that our students receive the highest quality education in a safe and stable environment. Furthermore, by efficiently utilizing NDUS resources and maintaining robust

healthcare education programs, we can secure a brighter future for North Dakota's students. I urge the Senate Education Committee to support this bill and help achieve these goals.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kevin Black

Member, State Board of Higher Education