

1 HB1350 – Approval of School District Bonds

2 Mandan Public Schools – Mike Bitz Testimony

3 Good morning Chairman Headland and members of the Finance and Taxation committee. For the  
4 record, my name is Mike Bitz. I am fortunate to serve as the Superintendent of Mandan Public  
5 Schools. I am here today to urge you to give HB 1350 a Do Pass recommendation.

6 Cities, counties, and park districts are all able to pass bond issues with a simple majority. For  
7 example, in June of 2014 the Burleigh-Morton County Detention Center was approved by 50.86%  
8 of Morton County voters (1,164 yes votes / 1,120 no votes). The Starion Sports Complex in  
9 Mandan was approved with 56.13% voter support (1,564 yes votes / 1,222 no votes) in 2015. I  
10 have trouble understanding the rationale that allows communities to build a jail and a hockey arena  
11 with 50% voter approval but requires schools to get support from 60% of voters.

12 Mandan Public Schools has been fortunate, our voters have approved the last two bond issues we  
13 asked them to consider; in 2005 Mandan Middle School was approved by 63.60% of voters (3,205  
14 yes / 1,834 no) and in 2012 Red Trail Elementary was approved with support from 79.76% of  
15 voters (2,207 yes / 560 no). Turnout in both school elections was equal to or surpassed turnout in  
16 the jail or hockey rink election.

17 I believe the intent of the 60% threshold was to protect landowners in rural districts as these people  
18 pay a disproportional share of the cost of school construction when a school is built. HB 1350  
19 addresses this issue in several ways. First it still requires a super-majority of 55% approval for  
20 any school bond referendum, which is a middle ground position that respects both perspectives.  
21 Second it maintains the 60% threshold for districts with less than 4,000 residents to ensure rural  
22 landowners continue to be protected.

23 Your predecessors in the ND Legislature understood the need for the type of language in HB  
24 1350. NDCC 57-15-14 sets different thresholds for passing a school district excess levy based on  
25 the population of the school district. I urge you to follow the precedent they have set and give HB  
26 1350 a DO PASS recommendation. Thank You, and I would be happy to stand for questions.