



HB 1003

January 3rd, 2023

Christopher Scott, North Dakota Student Association

701.340.3380 | Christopher.m.scott@ndus.edu

Chair Vigesaa 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 the student perspective on HB 1003

The North Dakota Student Association 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 as I am doing here today.

One of the biggest decisions for parents of college students and for college students themselves is how do I pay for college, and where do I go to college? North Dakota traditionally has had the lowest tuition rates in the country for years thanks to the management of the University System, and ample funding from the state legislature. Many students from other states and other countries come to North Dakota for a cheap quality college education! Going forward, it is therefore important to keep tuition affordable to students. Keeping tuition affordable for students not only brings more students to attend colleges in North Dakota, but also helps 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 time and time again in the campus visits in the fall 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 consider potentially increasing the budget beyond what is proposed if there is room for it! After all, Higher Education is a positive investment, the more you put in it, the more return you get, and is one of the ways North Dakota can address its workforce needs, particularly in critical areas, such as teachers and nurses.

On that note, one of the ways the legislature can do this is look at staff and faculty salaries. In today's world, inflation has impacted everything, from buildings costs, to the cost of living, to salaries. The Universities proposal 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, and directly affects the quality of education. 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 a bit more, should budget allow!

Every legislative session, the NDSA passes a resolution stating its legislative priorities for that session. Some things that are proposed to be funded with HB 1003 align directly with the legislative priorities we have for this session. The first and foremost that I want to mention 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 part of whether a student will succeed in college or not! In my personal experiences, many friends that I knew dropped out of college their first and second years due to personal mental 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 couple times, particularly during COVID-19 that when students were using the counseling services that universities provide, there were a couple times that were significantly backed up, and in order for that student to be seen, they might have to wait weeks or a couple months! So, this initiative would directly help with expanding the universities capacity at addressing student mental health needs!

Secondly, there are several investments that create scholarships in areas that ensure that 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 also 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 increasing access to an affordable education, which loops back to where I started! One of the most important factors for students going to college is where to go to college and how are they going to afford it! And as such in closing, support HB 1003 as it does increase student's access to a more accessible and affordable quality education!

