



February 14, 2023

Re: HB 1398; Support

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Taya Spelhaug and I am the Manager of the TechSpark program for Microsoft in North Dakota and we fully support HB 1398.

In a world where virtually every industry is being impacted by technology, computer science and cybersecurity are as foundational as reading, writing, and math. Ensuring that every child in North Dakota has access to quality computer science and cybersecurity education is crucial to our workforce development efforts, helping grow our economy and set students up for success regardless of what career path they pursue. Computer science skills are applicable far beyond the technology industry –we aren't only thinking about hiring future Microsoft employees. Nearly every occupation in our modern economy utilizing fundamental computing skills. These are base skills required for countless jobs in the energy sector, health care, agriculture, and aviation to name a few.

Furthermore, parents throughout North Dakota are demanding access to quality courses and programs in this area. Nationally, 93% of parents want their child's school to teach computer science, but fewer than half of schools offer these courses. A lack of access hurts our economy and creates major inequities in education, particularly for rural communities and groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in computer science and other STEM fields.

In addition to being a common-sense investment in our future workforce, education in both computer science and cybersecurity help protect our kids as they enter the digital realm. They not only need to be proficient with these new tools, they also need to learn how to protect their personal and financial information. We have all seen the increase in attempts from lone individuals, state-sponsored actors, and others to steal data from companies, governments, and individual citizens – this is also a public safety priority.

We in the technology-sector stand strongly behind you as you work to tackle these challenges. Microsoft has been a strong advocate for expanding access to computer science and cybersecurity education in North Dakota and across the nation. These efforts have included initiatives such as Technology Education and Literacy in Schools or TEALS. Because there is a critical shortage of computer science teachers, TEALS pairs trained computer science professionals with classroom teachers to team-teach computer science. In North Dakota we have had over 15 schools teaching computer science through the TEALS program.

It's because of this that we respectfully ask the committee to give HB 1398 a DO PASS recommendation to help secure the future of North Dakota's youth in this digital age. Thank you for your time, your consideration and your service to North Dakota.

Thank you,

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