

Birgit Pruess, Ph.D.
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Re: HB1531 with amendment
House Education Committee

Dear Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Dr. Birgit Pruess and I am a resident of Fargo, ND. I have a long history in Higher Education in North Dakota. I was Faculty Senate President at one of our institutions and faculty advisory member on the State Board of Higher Education. However, I am providing testimony here as a private citizen and not as a representative of any group. I am testifying in opposition to HB1531, especially as amended.

My reasons for this are outlined below.

- 1) The North Dakota State Constitution Article VIII, Section 6 dedicates the authority over our 11 institutions of Higher Education to the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE). I think this is an SBHE decision.
- 2) Has anybody calculated how much this bill will cost the state in dollars?
 - a. Tuition. It is well known that not every student pays the same tuition. There are in state tuitions, out of state tuitions, and international tuitions. Then, there are reciprocity agreements, such as between Minnesota and North Dakota which lower tuition for out of state students from a particular state. There are contracts with individual institutions (often worldwide) that have a negotiated tuition. If the tuition gets changed after the contract has been made, the other side has two options: pay the higher tuition or back out of the contract. In many cases, the latter is going to happen. Our institutions are facing an extremely competitive environment right now when it comes to enrollment. Any attempts by our State Legislature to decrease enrollment will lead to disaster. We already had to let go of many of our good faculty, which reduces educational opportunities for those of our students that this bill seems to protect. Or just simply the ones that will be left, should this bill pass in both chambers.
 - b. Grants. I once had a diversity supplement to an NIH grant. There are grants that are specifically targeted at populations that are underrepresented at our Higher Ed institutions. Is our State Legislature prepared to lose such grants? This can amount to millions to dollars across the State. And what about ongoing ones? Note that faculty who are leaving will take their grants with them, so long as their destination is another academic institution in the US.
- 3) Equity. I am strong a believer that everybody should have access to Education and that includes Higher Education. Just walking across any of our campuses, one can notice easily that there are not too many indigenous people or people of color. Does anybody seriously think that people are underrepresented because they are less intelligent? I sure hope not. Instead, the reason for their underrepresentation is usually financial. What is wrong about using a number of dollars that is small on the larger scale of things to help people educate themselves? Our society needs medical health professionals, scientists, lawyers, engineers,

teachers, and many others. Do we want to lose the ND Indian Scholarship Program? And what about the NATURE program, which “aims to improve science, technology, engineering and mathematics education among North Dakota tribal college and middle/high school students and to build a pathway for the pursuit of careers in STEM disciplines”. To your information, the NATURE program is under North Dakota EPSCoR, a federally funded program. Do we want to lose all these dollars, just to exclude our indigenous friends from getting an education? Does not North Dakota value it’s tribal relationships?

Altogether, I oppose HB1531 because of the decrease in enrollment we will face, the loss of faculty and staff, and most importantly the negative impact on our underrepresented populations, especially our indigenous friends from North Dakota’s Tribal Nations.

While I often testify in opposition to Higher Education bills, I like to make the point that I appreciate the hard work and dedication my legislators put into their work. Your service is much appreciated.

Sincerely and respectfully

Birgit Pruess, Ph.D.