

March 6, 2023

Dear House Education Committee:

I am a North Dakota resident, a parent of two North Dakota public schools students (one in middle school; the other in elementary school), a published historian, and a Professor at the University of North Dakota. My teaching duties preclude my live testimony, so I offer instead this written testimony.

I am writing you today as an individual citizen **to urge that you DO NOT PASS Senate Bill 2247 relating to so-called “specified concepts.”**

I am glad that the House committee made some changes to this bill that reduce its interference with academic freedom. However, the revised bill still seeks to limit needed training that can better prepare higher education faculty and staff to address the needs of North Dakotans.

As a historian, I study the impact of gender and racial bias in American culture. I teach my students about the impact of sexist and racist ideas and policies on diverse Americans. The revised SB 2247's Section 15-10.6-05 clarifies that this bill cannot limit my ability to teach, research, or write in my areas of specialization. While this clarification is welcome, it simply reinforces my academic freedoms that fall under the purview of the State Board of Higher Education.

However, SB 2247 DOES limit my ability to train and mentor my colleagues and students in methods to prevent intended or unintended discriminatory actions or policies.

To be clear, I do not hold, nor do I promote in my teaching nor in my scholarship any of the racist or sexist views included as “specified concepts” listed in Section 15-10.6-01 – 3. I study—and I teach my students about—the past so that we can learn from it, and work toward a more just society. I would never practice nor promote race or sex stereotyping nor scapegoating. Indeed, my motivation for studying and teaching history is precisely to help us move beyond stereotypes to greater understanding of individuals and communities both past and present. While SB 2247 apparently aims to prevent discrimination and stereotyping, it in fact restricts my ability and that of other trained professionals from working to end discrimination and stereotyping.

I fear that SB 2247 also will limit valuable training for future educators, including K-12 education. In their public-school classrooms and extracurricular programming, my children are rightly learning to be leaders who stand up to bullying and hateful speech and behavior. My children need teachers who have learned to think critically about, and learn from, racism and sexism in the past. They need teachers who know how to meet the needs of every student in their classrooms, regardless of their racial, ethnic, religious, or gender identity, and regardless of their (and their parents') political and religious beliefs.

As Robert Newman testified on behalf of the UND University Senate, SB 2247 “is not a remedy for any real problem,” but it “creates problems by interfering with legitimate education and training.” I urge you not to support SB 2247 and to vote Do Not Pass.

Sincerely,

Cynthia C. Prescott, Ph.D.