

Faith Wahl | UND Student Body President
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Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Faith Wahl, and I serve as the Student Body President at the University of North Dakota (UND). I am providing testimony opposing SB 2247, relating to specified concepts at institutions of higher education.

While SB 2247 is intended to be a preventative measure to protect free speech at institutions of higher education, the bill creates redundancy and lacks evidence-based data on the issue in the state. Section 15-10.6-02 prohibits “a student or employee of an institution under the control of the state board of higher education” from being discriminated against, penalized, or receiving adverse treatment due to the individuals refusal to assent to a specified concept, as outlined in 15-10.6-01. The right for an individual to engage in critical discussion and learn about new ideas is one that is not only protected by the First Amendment, but was already ratified by the 67th Legislative Assembly of North Dakota when passing HB 1503. From this perspective, SB 2247 is redundant as the protections that it is trying to offer, are already protected.

Beyond being redundant, SB 2247 lacks any evidence-based data to indicate that any seminars, workshops, or orientations related to “specified concepts” are taking place at any of the eleven public institutions under the control of the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE). In previous hearings for this bill, when committee members asked for quantitative data to support the need for the bill, only anecdotal information was presented. If an individual had concerns about trainings that would force them to comply with a certain ideology or viewpoint, each institution itself and the North Dakota University System (NDUS) both offer appeal processes that allow individuals to pursue appropriate remedies. Furthermore, the State Board of Higher Education voted to oppose SB 2247 on the basis of infringing on SBHE authority outlined in 15-10-11 of the North Dakota Century Code. Overall, SB 2247 would not serve as a beneficial piece of legislation for students at UND and throughout the state of North Dakota.

Finally, I would like to address the survey requirement outlined in 15-10.6-04 of SB 2247. In 15-10.6-02 on page 3 of the bill, it states that “An institution under the control of the state board of higher education may not ask the ideological or political viewpoint of a student, job applicant, job candidate, or candidate for promotion or tenure.” This section is in direct conflict with conducting a campus climate survey as required by this bill. Furthermore, students throughout the NDUS system typically have low response rates to surveys, therefore providing inaccurate results on these issues.

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education committee, I respectfully request a **DO NOT PASS on SB 2247**. Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer any questions that you might have.

Respectfully submitted,

Faith Wahl

UND Student Body President