



SB2247

House Education Committee

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Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Lisa Johnson, and I serve as the Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs for the North Dakota University System. I am here today on behalf of the North Dakota University System and its eleven institutions to provide testimony in opposition to SB2247.

Some of you have heard the Chancellor's comments to members of the Appropriations Committee, the Senate Workforce Development Committee, and other committees and events where he cited CA author, John Ellis, reflecting largely upon the educational and political state of the country as a whole and observed that the colleges and universities in the Midwest are some of the last places in the U.S. that welcome the open exchange of ideas and debate and in Ellis' words questioned, "is the Athens of the next generation somewhere on the Great Plains"? If you think that vastly differing viewpoints and debate around specified topics are new, they are not. The colleges and universities of the North Dakota University System have successfully navigated this precarious arena without shouting down invited guests or disinviting controversial speakers while supporting both academic freedom and the protected rights of free speech for students, faculty, and staff. Colleges and universities have been long-serving facilitators of open dialogue in nearly every subject since their inception.

The requirement of a "biennial survey of students and employees to assess the campus climate regarding diversity of thought and the respondents' comfort level in speaking freely on campus, regardless of political affiliation or ideology" presents conflicting language with that on Page 3, lines 3-5 that explicitly prohibits colleges and universities under the control of the State Board of Higher Education to even inquire about an ideological or political viewpoint of a student, job applicant, employee, or candidate for promotion or tenure. Yet the required biennial survey (Page 3, lines 25-28) would somehow necessitate that respondents disclose elements related to their specific ideology or political affiliation that are strictly forbidden in Section 15-10.6-02 Section 2. (Page 3, lines 3-5)

If SB2247 were to pass as presented to the House Education Committee, the North Dakota University System does not have the estimated \$1.5 million to administer the survey in 2024, 2026, and 2028. Further, the NDUS would need an appropriation to procure, compile and publicly report the findings both on the institutions' websites and to the committee designated by legislative management.



Estimated costs are derived from a recent campus inquiry regarding costs associated with implementing a campus climate survey that ranged from \$30,000 to \$100,000.

- \$70,000 x 2 (UND & NDSU)
- \$50,000 x 4 (DSU, MaSU, MiSU, & VCSU)
- \$30,000 x 5 (BSC, DCB, LRSC, NDSCS, & WSC)

The North Dakota University System supports the position of the State Board of Higher Education and recommends a “Do Not Pass” on SB2247. I remain available to members of the Committee for additional questions.