



North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives
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March 15, 2023

To: N.D. Senate Education Committee
From: Zac Smith, communications and government relations director, NDAREC
RE: **Support of HB 1398**

Chairman Elkin, and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Zac Smith, and I'm the communications and government relations director of the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives, or (NDAREC). We represent sixteen electric distribution cooperatives and five generation and transmission cooperatives that generate, transmit and distribute electricity and maintain more than 64,000 miles of powerlines across the state of North Dakota.

The North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives supports K-12 educational programs focused on computer science and cybersecurity. In today's highly interconnected world, it's imperative that technology is available, and data and systems are protected and secure. To accomplish this, industry and government must partner to enhance, grow and inspire those who will comprise our future workforce and encourage careers in the fields of computer science and cybersecurity.

The electric industry has complex information technology systems that improve service reliability, resilience and efficiency; therefore, electric utilities must continuously work to secure electric systems and data. The last few years have demonstrated that many jobs are reliant on technology.

It can be difficult to recruit and/or find local qualified professionals required to manage the protection of computer systems. Providing opportunities for all students to engage in computer science and cybersecurity programs is crucial to growing the local workforce of tomorrow. Therefore, we urge a DO PASS recommendation on HB 1398 and thank you for opportunity to submit testimony.

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