

NDSU

STUDENT GOVERNMENT

SB 2247

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Chairman Elkin and Members of the Committee: My name is Seth Lumley, and I am the Executive Commissioner of Legislative Affairs for North Dakota State University's Student Government. I would like to provide testimony in opposition to SB 2247 and to present the perspective of NDSU students on SB 2247.

NDSU Student Government is an organization of students at NDSU elected and appointed to represent the interests of the NDSU student body both externally at places like the capitol and internally through our student senate. We are comprised of members from all academic colleges at North Dakota State University, ensuring students from all majors and backgrounds have a voice. Our mission is to leave the university better than we arrived through ensuring that student voices are heard both on campus and at the legislature.

Being able to openly discuss topics that lie at the heart of many of the divisions in our country today is the only way to overcome our differences. As a political science student, some of these conversations happen in the classroom and serve as an invaluable learning opportunity. It is for these freedom of speech concerns that I provide testimony today.

This year, NDSU has had two speakers come to our campus espousing beliefs that many students either strongly agreed or disagreed with. However, both of these speakers proved that free speech on campus is pivotal to the success of our university. While many students were indignant toward these speakers, some even advocating their removal, it is our belief that taking away free speech for one is a threat to the free speech of all and is a fundamental encroachment on the rights of students and educators.

The inclusion of instruction as part of the definition of 'training' on page 2, line 21 combined with page 3, lines 11-12, would have negative consequences for the future of free speech on college campuses and in the classroom. Including materials from individuals who hold some of the egregious viewpoints defined as divisive concepts in this bill is an important aspect of understanding the mistakes of the past, especially in a program like political science or history. Allowing students to encounter ideas they disagree with is a fundamental part of the kind of growth and development our institutions of higher education are for, but they can't properly engage with these ideas if they are never exposed to them. While many will argue that these divisive topics will push our students in the wrong direction, the students are able to determine for themselves what is right or wrong. All they need is the freedom to do so. It is for these reasons that I urge you to oppose SB 2247. Thank you Chairman Elkin and Members of the Committee.