

HB 1128
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Chair Heinert and members of the Committee, my name is Maxwell Eriksrud, and I am a junior at the University of North Dakota (UND). Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for HB 1128.

On move-in day in 2022, I had no idea I'd meet some of the people who are now my closest friends. One of those people was my freshman roommate, who recently invited me to be part of his wedding. It was such an honor to celebrate that special day with him, and it reminded me of the lasting bonds we built here at UND starting in Walsh Hall.

Looking back, I can confidently say that the residence halls and student services at UND have had a profound impact not just on me but on countless other students. These facilities play a pivotal role in fostering community, building relationships, and creating a sense of belonging. The modern residence halls and supportive services provide students with a strong foundation for their academic and personal success. They contribute to an environment where students feel valued, welcomed, and empowered to succeed.

As a student tour guide and ambassador for UND, I have the privilege of sharing my experiences with prospective students. I often emphasize the power of first impressions. During my college search, I toured seven different universities. It was my mother, a proud UND alumna, suggested that we visit UND one summer on our way to our family farm. At first, I agreed with little enthusiasm, thinking mainly about its proximity to our farm.

However, everything changed when I arrived on campus. I was immediately welcomed by friendly students and staff, and I saw the incredible new facilities under construction. Walking through campus, I felt the difference these beautiful spaces made, and that positive first impression ultimately shaped my decision to become part of UND.

By approving this bill, you will not only invest in the future of our campuses but also in the future of our state. It's important to recognize how facilities shape students' perceptions of North Dakota, both for in-state students and those coming from out of state like me. For in-state students, modern and well-maintained facilities affirm pride in their home state. For out-of-state students, they create an image of North Dakota as a place of opportunity and innovation—a place worth calling home long after graduation.

Through my involvement within the North Dakota University System, I have been able to travel to many other campuses and have found that unfortunately, as things stand, some facilities fail to showcase the best of what North Dakota has to offer. By providing low interest loan options to this institution, you will allow them access to needed capital to improve these facilities.

However, I have some concerns with the 25 million cap. I understand that we wouldn't want each institution to borrow money at the same time starting right after this bill would be approved. However, over a 5–10 year period I believe that the 25 million would inhibit the needed renovations on these campuses, and would likely cause unwanted conflicts between the institutions as to who should receive the needed loans.

That said, I believe this bill has the potential to make a profoundly positive impact on students. By modernizing and improving campus facilities, we can ensure that every student who steps onto one of our campuses feels welcomed, inspired, and excited about the opportunities North Dakota holds for them. To help students like me become lifelong North Dakotans, I strongly encourage you to amend this bill to address the funding cap while maintaining its vision of creating a better future for higher education in our state.