

Statement of Opposition to House Bill 1222

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

I'm writing to voice my strong opposition to House Bill 1222 and to urge you to vote against it.

House Bill 1222 mandates the daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools and requires unexcused students to stand and show respect to the flag. While exemptions are allowed with parental consent, the bill also grants broad immunity from liability for school officials enforcing this requirement.

This bill presents several concerns:

Forced Political Indoctrination – Proponents of this bill often decry "indoctrination" in schools when it comes to topics like diversity, equity, inclusion, LGBTQ+ topics, climate change, and Social Emotional Learning. Yet, forcing students to recite—or even stand in deference to—a pledge they may not believe in is the very definition of indoctrination. Public education should encourage critical thinking, not force compulsory displays of loyalty to a government. Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is blind nationalism, not thoughtful civic engagement.

Violation of First Amendment Rights – The U.S. Supreme Court (*West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 1943) ruled that compelling students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance infringes upon their constitutional rights. Even requiring non-participating students to stand and show respect forces them into an expression they may not believe in, which is a violation of free speech protections.

Risk of Coercion and Discrimination – Even with an opt-out option, students who choose not to participate may face peer pressure, ostracization, or even bullying. Creating an environment where some students are singled out for their beliefs is counter to the principles of individual freedom.

Legal and Financial Risks to Schools – The bill's broad immunity clause may not fully shield schools from lawsuits if students' rights are challenged. Schools could still face legal action, leading to unnecessary legal costs and administrative burdens.

Unnecessary Government Overreach – Public schools should focus on education, not compelling symbolic gestures. There is no evidence that mandatory recitation of the Pledge serves any educational purpose, and this bill places an undue burden on schools to enforce participation in a practice that should remain voluntary.

House Bill 1222 is unnecessary, unconstitutional, and hypocritical. If lawmakers oppose *indoctrination* in schools, they should not be in the business of forcing children to recite pledges of loyalty. Schools should respect students' rights and allow them to make their own choices regarding participation in the Pledge of Allegiance without coercion or penalty.

Sincerely,

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Mandan