

Legislative Assembly

North Dakota House of Representatives

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Anna Novak, representative from district 33.

What you have before you is House Bill 1222. In a nutshell, this bill requires that public schools across North Dakota begin each day with the Pledge of Allegiance.

The genesis of this bill was simply a result of both my surprise and disappointment when I realized that many public schools across the state don't start their day with the Pledge of Allegiance, like I did as child. After a quick Google search, I found that 47 states have different laws requiring the Pledge to be said in schools. Currently, North Dakota "allows" the Pledge to be said - so they can, but don't have to. My bill would require the Pledge to be instituted at all public schools across North Dakota at the start of the school day. If a parent or guardian wants to exempt their student from participating, all they have to do is provide written consent for them to not participate in reciting the Pledge. No reason is needed. For the record, Pennsylvania, Utah, Florida and Texas have laws requiring the Pledge in schools, similar to house bill 1222.

I don't want to add an additional task for our teachers to have to remember on a daily basis. So logistically, I think it makes the most sense for the Pledge to be initiated at the school office over the intercom. The school administrators I've visited with about this bill agree. But, I didn't want to specifically prescribe that in the bill, in case a smaller school doesn't have an intercom system, the intercom isn't working or any other reason that might come up locally.

The bill also doesn't have any penalties for not saying the Pledge - for the schools that don't initiate it or individuals that don't say it. I don't envision teachers or anyone else walking around like drill sergeants, trying to enforce the law. My hope is that the school boards would deal with any issues locally. But I want to make sure it's included in my testimony that public education is paid for by local, state and federal tax dollars - made possible because we live in America. I don't believe American children in public schools beginning their day by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance should be viewed as controversial.

The intent of this bill is simply to encourage reverence for the flag as well as to encourage patriotism for the country we live in. I don't believe that there are many opportunities in a child's school day for either. I recognize that no matter what we do here in the legislature or in our public schools, we cannot mandate patriotism. But I believe that we do have a responsibility to encourage it, which is exactly the reason I am introducing this bill.

With that, I'll stand for questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.