

Dear members of the committee, my name is Whitney Benter. I was born and raised in Bismarck, ND and live here today with my husband and two children with our third due any day now. Our son attends Kindergarten at a public school here in Bismarck as will our other children—we are the constituents this Bill would directly affect, and we are urging a **DO NOT PASS on HB 1456**.

Our public schools need to remain free from any religious affiliation or be open to **ALL** religious affiliations. In our family, we do not subscribe to any theocratic ideology and do not force any one religion onto our children, but we have taught them about Christian values... as well as Buddhist values, Judaic values, Indigenous beliefs, Islamic beliefs and simple non-belief.

If the State of ND would like to install a Chaplain into public schools--which faith ideology would that Chaplain be aligned with? Surely not just Christian teachings as our schools house a myriad of children from different belief backgrounds. Is the state willing to force its taxpayers to dole out millions of dollars to appoint figures of all religions represented in schools so not one child feels ostracized by the lack of inclusion? I would like to subtly interject that the Church of Satan does exist and there are children associated with this belief system right here in North Dakota. Personally, I would fight for their ideologies to be represented in schools right alongside that Christian chaplain this bill would place in front of them every day.

Rather than possibly excluding multiple religions in favor of just one, would it not make much more sense to keep any and all religious figures out of our public schools? Should parents like their children to have access to religious guidance, they have the option to attend Church or even enroll their children into Private schools where this already exists.

Separation of church and state is one of our nation's founding cornerstone beliefs. Put in place so not one religion is favored or pressed onto our constituents above another. This bill stands in direct opposition of that.

Perhaps if my more religious constituents would like to force a faithful and "Christian" presence in public school systems, we could start by instituting free breakfast and lunches for our youth. Surely the \$500,000+ taxpayer dollars escheated to hiring an irrelevant religious figure would be better served by feeding our hungry children.

"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. / If one of you tells him, "Go in peace; stay warm and well fed," but does not provide for his physical needs, what good is that?" –James Chapter 2, Verse 15.

For the sake of common sense and upholding the very core value of Separation of Church and State, I am urging you **DO NOT PASS Bill 1456**. Thank you.

Whitney Benter