

CONCERNED
WOMEN *for* AMERICA
LEGISLATIVE ACTION COMMITTEE

February 11, 2025
House Education Committee
Testimony in Support of HB 1456

Chairman Pat Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, I am Linda Thorson, State Director for Concerned Women for America of North Dakota, testifying for Concerned Women for America Legislative Action Committee. I am here today on behalf of our North Dakota members in support of HB 1456.

Concerned Women for America, the state's largest public policy women's organization, has as its mission to protect and promote Biblical values and Constitutional principles through prayer, education, and advocacy. We strongly support the provisions in HB 1456; it meets our goal of providing quality education to a level of excellence in academic achievement.

Enabling schools to hire certified chaplain volunteers to serve as trusted guides and spiritual leaders within school communities is a way to provide a healthy environment that enriches children's academic skills during a critical time of their development.

1. Educational Research Supports Mentors

- According to [leading educational researchers](#), learning environments play a significant role in student success. Enhanced learning environments include opportunities for students to talk about themselves. Communication and maintaining relationships have also been found to hold an important role for students to achieve success.ⁱ
- Comprehensive character education is "the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue."ⁱⁱ Students spend nearly 900 hours a year in school, so schools must develop [respectful environments](#) where they learn core, ethical values, and have opportunities to communicate with a trusted adult.
- Mentoring programs have been shown to have positive effects on children. Those outcomes include improved reading scores,ⁱⁱⁱ increased social competence, emotional adjustment, and a more positive self-image.^{iv}
- School counselor shortages are significantly impacting children as they struggle with their mental health at alarming rates.^v

2. Religious Liberty

- Chaplaincy programs are offered in various settings including the military, hospitals, prisons, and legislative bodies. These programs have been consistently upheld in the courts.^{vi} Students should not be prohibited from the same environment lawmakers are granted. Each day in our state, at the beginning of floor sessions of both bodies, a chaplain provides legislators with spiritual guidance through prayer.
- The [U.S. Supreme Court, in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*](#), ruled that a government action that advances religion does not violate the Establishment Clause. The First Amendment’s Establishment Clause does not “‘compel the government to purge from the public sphere’ anything an objective observer could reasonably infer endorses or ‘partakes of the religious.’” As the Court concluded, “Respect for religious expressions is indispensable to life in a free and diverse Republic—whether those expressions take place in a sanctuary or on a field, and whether they manifest through the spoken word or a bowed head.”^{vii}

Chaplaincy programs provide crucial support services, recognizing that many students and school personnel value the opportunity to seek support that is provided from a religious perspective.^{viii} Certified chaplains made available to help students express their feelings in non-destructive ways, could ultimately diffuse tension before it escalates into conflict.^{ix}

While schools have a long record of opening their doors to volunteer spiritual leaders when tragedies occur, HB 1456 allows certified chaplains to provide support to students and faculty on a much more regular basis to enhance learning environments.

Please vote "Do Pass" on HB 1456.

ⁱ Editorial Board, Overview of Robert Marzano’s Model of Effectiveness, (10/31/12), Resilient Educator, [Overview of Marzano’s Model of Teaching Effectiveness | Resilient Educator](#)

ⁱⁱ Lickona, Thomas (2004), Character matters: How to help our children develop good judgment, integrity, and other essential virtues. New York: Touchstone

ⁱⁱⁱ Hornery, S. (2011). Reading for life: A multi-method test of the efficacy of a volunteer-administered intervention targeting the reading skills and reading self-concept of young children with reading difficulties, University of Western Sydney, Australia.

^{iv} DuBois, D. L., Holloway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30, 157–197.

^v Rock, Amy, (12/18/2023) School Counselor Shortages by State and Its Impact on Students, Campus Safety, [School Counselor Shortages by State and Its Impact on Students](#)

^{vi} See *Katcoff v. Marsh*, 755 F.2d 223 (2d Cir. 1985) (upholding military chaplaincy); *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783 (1983) (upholding state legislature’s practice of opening sessions with prayers by a State-employed chaplain); *Therault v. Silber*, 547 F.2d 1279 (5th Cir. 1977) (upholding prison chaplains); *Carter v. Broadlawns Med. Ctr.*, 857 F.2d 448 (8th Cir. 1988) (upholding public hospital chaplaincy); *Freedom From Religion Found. v. Mack*, 49 F.4th 941 (5th Cir. 2022) (upholding justice of the peace’s chaplaincy and courtroom prayer program); see also *Murray v. Buchanan*, 720 F.2d 689, 690 (D.C. Cir. 1983) (upholding public funding of congressional chaplains).

^{vii} Diaz, Mario, Esq. (6/30/2022), No Freedom Without Prayer, Concerned Women for America, [No Freedom Without Prayer – Concerned Women for America](#)

^{viii} Gomez, Jorge, (03/24/2024) Volunteer Chaplains are Constitutional and Beneficial for Students, First Liberty Org., [Volunteer Chaplains in Public Schools Are Constitutional—and Beneficial for Students - News - First Liberty](#)

^{ix} National School Chaplaincy Association, (10/07/24), [A Calm Campus: How School Chaplains Promote Peace and Well-being. — National School Chaplain Association](#)