

Written Testimony Opposing House Bill 1456

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David Gipson 1314 8th St NW APT 207 Minot, ND 58701

Members of the Legislative Assembly,

I strongly oppose HB 1456, which would allow uncertified chaplains to serve in North Dakota public schools. This bill raises significant concerns about the separation of church and state, the qualifications of those providing support to students, and the potential for religious influence in public education.

Public schools should be inclusive environments where all students, regardless of their religious background, feel safe and supported. Allowing chaplains—who are not required to be licensed educators or trained mental health professionals—to provide "support, services, and programs" creates a dangerous gray area where religious influence may be imposed on vulnerable students. This could lead to exclusion, coercion, or even harm, particularly for students from diverse faiths or non-religious backgrounds.

Furthermore, the bill provides legal immunity to chaplains except in cases of deliberate harm. This lack of accountability is alarming, especially when dealing with sensitive student issues. Counselors, social workers, and educators undergo rigorous training and certification to support students effectively. Chaplains, even if well-intentioned, do not have the same professional standards.

Rather than funding an unnecessary and constitutionally questionable program, we should invest in licensed school counselors and mental health professionals who are trained to provide evidence-based support to all students. I urge you to reject HB 1456 and prioritize resources that serve every student fairly and equitably.

Thank you.

David Gipson

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