

Testimony on HB 1456
February 10, 2025

As a former University Professor of Educational Leadership and Dean of the College of Education and Human Development at UND, (retired) and earlier in my career an ordained United Methodist Minister, I **oppose** HB 1456.

1. The bill would allow chaplains in public schools for students from kindergarten through secondary school. While the government provides chaplains to the military, those in the military are adults. School students are minors. The sponsors of this bill do not understand the difference the role of religion plays in the lives of minors vs. that of adults. Adults are of the age of consent, legally. Minors are not. Having the government place religious chaplains in public schools is therefore clearly inappropriate and unethical, if not illegal. Students could be subjected to religious indoctrination.
2. ND is increasingly very ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse. Which religions will the school chaplains represent? This law would create confusion and controversy for students, parents, and school officials.
3. The chaplains are permitted “to provide support, services, and programs,” according to the bill. But this language is so broad and vague that the chaplains may do virtually anything they wish. For example, a chaplain could offer a “program” on creationism, which would conflict with the biology curriculum. Creationism is a religious belief about the origins of life on earth and is not based on science. What “support and services” would the chaplains provide? Counseling, even though they may not have any qualifications to do counseling?
4. If the sponsors are concerned about not having adequate support and services for students, they should authorize more funding for qualified school counselors and social workers.
5. In reality, if the bill becomes law, the vast majority of school chaplains will be Christian. Which raises the suspicion that the sponsors are advocates for Christian Nationalism, a distortion of the Christian Faith according to many Christian denominations represented in North Dakota.

Daniel Rice, Fargo (My testimony does not purport to represent the position of UND.)