

HB 1456 Testimony in Opposition

February 11th, 2025

Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee. My name is Lisa Hermosillo, and I reside at Minot Air Force Base. I am writing to you today to urge a DO NOT PASS recommendation on HB 1456.

In just close to a month and a half of the session beginning, North Dakotans have faced a slew of legislative bills that seem to have a well familiarized underlying agenda; religion.

It started with the following bills:

- HB 1145 - wanting to require the 10 Commandments posted in every classroom in public schools and institutions
- HCR 3003 - proclaiming that North Dakota is to acknowledge the kingship of Jesus Christ
- HB 1373 - defining life at concept and dismantling IVF for North Dakota families while seeking to penalize our women and our healthcare workers
- HB 1590 – allowing public funds to support private schools
- SB 2355 – requiring creationism to be taught in public schools

This bill in particular, is entitling an initial allotment of \$500,00 to cover the costs that would incur from building the program. Additionally, it will allow each district no more than \$200,000 should they decide to participate. We have 179 school districts in our state. Do you know what that amounts to for all the districts if they were to receive that funding? \$35,800,000. This is what we chose? What about schools that need renovations? Families who can't afford school lunches? What about the lack of bus transportation for parents and their kids? What about teacher's pay? I can think of so many other places that \$35.8 millions could go to. Maybe use some of that money and help North Plains Elementary School at Minot Air Force base get air conditioning or fix parking for parent picks at other schools? Yet, all of a sudden, we find all this money for chaplains. This just proves the habitual poor spending habits and prioritizing issues we have for our education system.

I also noticed under section 6.6 it states that actions against certified chaplains will only if they maliciously, willfully, and deliberately intend to cause harm to, harass, or intimate an individual seeking its services, but there is nothing about coercion or attempt to convert.

The bill states that certified chaplains the schools hire will not be held to the education standards and practices board of North Dakota. What training is involved? What is the curriculum? How will the chaplains be "vetted". Who decides if they meet the criteria? What happens when those who volunteer for this position are found to be actively working to recruit to convert to their

denomination? I'm very concerned that chaplains will be tempted to push their beliefs because there is nothing morally or ethically stopping it from happening, according to this bill.

If we do this for one religion, then we absolutely have to do this for ALL religions.

This bill fails to address the following:

1. What kind of curriculum would be used
2. How applicants would be vetted
 - a. Would it be based on a particular religion?
3. It does not encourage applicants from all religions
 - a. Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Latter Day Saints, Catholic?
 - b. Which religions will be restricted? Satanism? What happens when they sue for their right?

We have excellent and well-trained school counselors already employed in our North Dakota Education System. If there is any shortage occurring right now, then maybe we need to push for more social workers and school counselors. They follow strict ethics and have gone through their schooling and certification/licensure processes. I feel more than secure and comfortable with my kids reaching out to the school counselor and the trusting relationship that they have; why? Because I know they aren't being pressured, taught, or influenced by a particular religion. My family is part of the LDS church, and I do not support this bill. When and if we seek counsel, we know we can find resources, services, and guidance from our church at any time. I do not force my religion on anyone, and it is disappointing to see fellow Christians do the opposite. This is why so many turn away or want nothing to do with religion.

Additionally, I feel it's important to note that a current bill, HB 1490, wants to require psychological evaluations for school counselors. Is there a hidden intent behind this bill as well? If you want psychological evaluations done for school counselors, will that same standard also be applied to chaplains if this bill were to pass?

It is my personal belief that this bill in combination with HB 1490 is a steppingstone to get rid of school counselors altogether. When will it end? Will it get worse? Will school counselors eventually be forced to become chaplains? I reached out to a co-sponsor of this bill and was told that the school boards would be the ones to decide if chaplains should have psychological evaluations done. This is a bit odd considering; Legislators are the ones wanting to make it law demanding school counselors to have these done. Again, do we not see the discrepancy here? Do we understand the amount of litigation that is going to come from this?

Lastly, will chaplains be held to state mandatory reporting laws regarding child abuse? Or will they be protected? This bill does not address this, and it is highly concerning that this was not thought of.

We already have healthcare workers considering relocating to another state, not to mention teachers who pay for their own school supplies for their students. This bill is unequivocally abandoning the public school system and all its faculty.

I am embarrassed that this is the direction that our legislature is heading. We need to get back to having a legislative body that understands the importance of authentic governing without religion. It is becoming evident that many cannot seem to draft bills without their religion, and many who co-sponsor simply because of religion. Great legislation comes from original ideas, relative arguments, and critical thinking, no carbon copied bills. This same bill was already tried in South Dakota and was strongly voted down. The Christian nationalist bill mill attempt on our state has gone too far. Please uphold the constitution.

Listen to your social workers, your school counselors, the clinical trial manager, advocates, and the 221 chaplains who signed document number 32326 in opposition.

Thank you,

Lisa Hermosillo

Links

<https://www.aclu.org/news/religious-liberty/why-allowing-chaplains-in-public-schools-harms-students#:~:text=Installing%20chaplains%20in%20public%20schools,and%20religious%20coercion%20of%20students.>

<https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/chaplains-civil-rights-and-faith-groups-oppose-public-school-chaplain-programs>

<https://floridaphoenix.com/2024/08/13/faith-leaders-warn-schools-of-dangers-of-optional-voluntary-chaplain-program/>

<https://cmarlinwarfield.com/why-schools-hiring-chaplains-is-a-terrible-idea/>

<https://www.au.org/the-latest/articles/chaplains-letter-schools2024/>

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndtx/pr/retired-cook-childrens-hospital-chaplain-sentenced-60-years-prison-child-pornography>

<https://fox59.com/news/former-police-chaplain-accused-of-raping-young-child-hundreds-of-times-court-docs-reveal/>

<https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/Clergy%20as%20Mandated%20Reporters%20of%20Child%20Abuse%20and%20Neglect.pdf>