



WESTERN DAKOTA ENERGY ASSOCIATION

January 28, 2025

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Testimony of:

Geoff Simon, Lobbyist #144
in support of HB 1476 – School facility assessments
House Education Committee

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee:

On behalf of the city, county and school district members of the Western Dakota Energy Association (WDEA), we wish to express our support for HB 1476, which provides a process for the Department of Public Instruction to obtain a current facilities assessment of all public school buildings in North Dakota.

Rep. Novak's bill is a welcome response to concerns identified during the 2023-24 interim by an ad hoc school construction coalition in which WDEA was a participant/facilitator. At the outset of the coalition's formation, we were aware that there were at least a handful of public school districts in aging, obsolete facilities, that lacked financial resources to fix the problem. The coalition conducted a survey of all public school districts which revealed, not surprisingly, that many districts lacked a current facilities assessment. This legislation would allow the legislature and DPI to get their arms around the scope of the problem, identifying the deferred maintenance and construction needs of districts throughout North Dakota.

As you'll gather from other testimony, this bill is still a work in progress. DPI lacks expertise in this area, and while OMB has managed assessments of state facilities, there is concern it could create a significant burden on existing OMB personnel. However, all engaged in the discussion recognize the need and are supportive of the effort. As testimony will suggest, our coalition may need a bit of additional time working behind the scenes to come up with amended language to accomplish this important project that gives all parties comfort.

A second objective of this legislation is to set in motion a rulemaking process in which DPI will gather input from a wide range of stakeholders to develop school facilities standards that one would expect all public school should aspire to achieve in 2025. We have learned in our research that many states have such standards in place, but when cited by our members as the basis of their plans for a school building project, patrons scoffed at the other state's standard because "that's Minnesota, and not how we do it in North Dakota."

Bottom line, we have K-12 students in North Dakota who are not receiving an equitable shot at a 21st Century education because they are being taught in a poor learning environment. We need to get a handle on the scope of the deficiencies in our public school facilities, to enable the legislature to determine the best course of action to address the problem.

Please support our effort to find a workable solution to complete this important task.

Geoff Simon
Executive Director

Western Dakota Energy Association
1661 Capitol Way, Bismarck ND 58501
www.ndenergy.org • 701-527-1832