

**Testimony to the House Education Committee on HB 1476**  
**Wednesday, January 29, 2025**

Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee, for the record, my name is Josh Johnson and I am the school superintendent at Valley City Public Schools and a proud representative of the School Construction Coalition. The coalition was formed in July 2023 by a small group of school leaders and educational partners who shared a common concern about the increasing age of school buildings, deteriorating facility conditions, and growing deferred maintenance costs across school districts. My testimony today is support of this measure that will address one of the four recommendations that the coalition presented to the School Funding Task Force during interim committee meetings the past two years.

A Facility Condition Assessment is a research-based method used to evaluate the physical state of a school building, including its infrastructure, systems, and finishes. These assessments are most often completed by professional architects, engineers, or construction managers. Valley City Public Schools completed our first facility assessment in 2018 for a cost around \$10,000. We have since updated this assessment in the fall of 2021. I've provided each of you with a copy of this assessment for your information. The coalition administered a survey in January 2023 to all 166 school districts. Based upon the responses, we found only 46 out of 111 school districts have completed facility conditions assessment in the past five years. A question the coalition began to ask was how do we know there's issue with our school facilities if fewer than half of all school districts in North Dakota have completed a facilities condition assessment?

Across the country, 11 states currently fund facility condition assessments and an additional 15 states require an assessment to be completed by the school district. Throughout our research, the coalition focused on two states that have taken steps to drastically improve schools. In addition to allocating state funds to improve school conditions, the states of Kansas and Wyoming have implemented facility conditions assessment programs. These assessments are used to help identify and address needs within schools. Both of these states have used facility condition assessments to improve their schools and provide equitable and adequate learning conditions for all students in their school districts.

In conclusion, on behalf of the school construction coalition, thank you for the opportunity to testify and we urge a do pass recommendation for HB 1476. The coalition believes this is one of several actions necessary to ensure that all students in North Dakota have access to safe, adequate, and equitable school facilities. We believe that this program will not only support the long-term sustainability of school buildings, but also enhance the educational environments for students and our educators across North Dakota.

In addition to standing for questions, I would like to provide you with a copy of the coalition report and recommendations from September 2024 and highlight a few examples of facility condition issues in the schools in North Dakota.