

House Bill 1491

Testimony of Susan L. Anderson

House Education Committee

February 11, 2025

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding HB 1491. I am Susan Anderson, a life-long North Dakota resident, and a retired educator, theater director, coach of speech and student congress, and currently the manager of numerous regional and state speech tournaments in North Dakota. More importantly, I am a parent of North Dakota graduates and now a grandparent to North Dakota's future students. It is because of these roles that I am submitting testimony in opposition to HB 1491.

Before I address the challenges of this bill, I want to begin by highlighting what I believe is a core truth of athletics and fine arts activities in North Dakota. For many students who participate in an activity, the experience is exactly what it is intended to be: a meaningful extension of the educational process that provides an opportunity for students to compete fairly against other students in an educational environment. For the thousands of other students, alumni, family, and fans of North Dakota these activities provide a rallying point and a source of pride and unity that weaves together their communities. This is a uniquely American phenomenon. There is no model elsewhere in the world where activities and athletics are tied so directly to the educational process.

Although no system is perfect, as a coach who has attended 32 national speech and debate tournaments, I would say we are the lucky ones. I have listened to coaches across the nation complain and criticize the rules set forth by their state associations, including transfer regulations, and yet, as a long-time coach, never have I heard that regarding the transfer rules adopted and administered by the NDHSAA. As a coach and director of fine arts I am aware that sports is very different than fine arts. However, having had the opportunity to coach alongside sports coaches, I am also keenly aware that the values, the team building goals, and the mind set of coaches, whether sports or fine arts, are closely aligned. We all want to instill in our students the importance of working as one, growing as one, winning gracefully as one and losing with class as one. I strongly believe this piece of legislation rips at the core of those morals and places the emphasis of success on the win. How as a coach do I work from the beginning of a student's career on those beliefs, only to have a school scout and possibly attempt to recruit my best students from a program I have spent years building.

As important as teambuilding and values of sports and extracurricular fine arts are, even more critical if the implications this legislation brings to the education process itself. First and foremost, I am certain that there is not one member of this committee or anyone in this room that does not believe a student's education itself is not of

paramount importance in this argument. Let's look at a scenario that is highly possible if this legislation is passed. A student is playing football at Anderson High School and the English teacher decides to start the year teaching William Shakespeare's play, *MacBeth*. After the completion of football season, the student transfers to another high school which has a better basketball program only to find that this English teacher is teaching the same Shakespeare play during his/her second quarter. The disruption of educational continuity would be astronomical, especially in the science and math curriculums. These transfer scenarios can lead to a student struggling academically, which then leads to student frustration and possible failure. This is not what any educator wants a student to experience. The continuity of education must be the foundation of any education system in North Dakota.

Finally, as important as my life and experience as an educator, coach, and director were and are to me, most importantly my role as a parent stands as my strongest pillar of opposition to HB1491. The havoc this legislation could wreak on the integrity of the family would be devastating. It is no secret that our world is more and more divided than ever, but the ramifications of this legislation have the potential to divide North Dakota's families even more. Families do make difficult decisions regarding what is best for their children, but offering this choice to move from school to school and community to community has the potential to damage relationships within the family and the communities. Passing this legislation will create a divided house of cards that will tumble with a breeze. Thank you for your time today and serving as legislators that are making North Dakota great. Please vote Do Not Pass.