

Testimony in Support of HB 1604

Carter Hass,
February 13, 2025

Mr. Chairman, Mrs. Vice Chairman, and Honorable Members of The House Education Committee. My name is Carter Hass and I stand in support of House Bill 1604.

As you know, I go to Valley City High School, and our school has extreme issues. I use the word extreme not to overdue or over-exemplify the situation but rather to perfectly define the problem. A few years ago, our basement flooded in my family's home, and there was a distinct smell of mold and wet carpet. After everything dried up and we cleaned the entire basement, that smell became ingrained in my mind. Every time I walk into certain parts of the school building, I can sense that smell. I do not doubt that there has been mold within our school building. This bill would help schools like mine and restore small-town communities. Therefore, I urge you to give a DO PASS recommendation for this bill.

Now, going back to Valley City High School, there are a few key things in our school that stand out

1. **The bats.** I've seen them, and I witnessed a teacher catch one.
2. **Dead animals.** Our school has tunnels underneath the building near the north gym. Typically, students aren't allowed to stay within the tunnels because there's nothing there. But if you go into the tunnels through the old door in the North gym and then take a left and go into a tiny crawl space, you'll find the skeletons of dead birds or mice in those discreet areas. It is the only place where you will find them. For clarity, there is no rotting flesh within the tunnels, and there have been no recent live animal sightings besides bats. Once again, the last time I saw a bat was the previous year, near the choir room on the first floor.
3. **Asbestos** in Washington school and the high school.
4. **Regulation of heat and cooling.** I have been in classrooms at 50° and 90°.
5. **Roof leaking.** The roof leaks to the point that garbage cans around the building collect water and the pipes are so old that the bathrooms and the wrestling room have flooded.

This is not to defame or devalue VCPS and/or its custodians, who do the most fantastic job and whom I respect. Overall, the high school is perilous and needs complete rebuilding. The Administration has determined that repairs will not be sufficient in the long term. Simply put, we can do nothing; we need a new school. This bill would provide our district funding for a new school after the taxpayers refused to pay. As a student, I testify for this state's current and future generations, and they need your help.

Finally, I believe you must ensure every student has a safe building to learn in the state, which must be there for the communities whose buildings are old and outdated, especially small towns. On September 19, 2024, News Dakota reported on the school construction coalition specifically outlining its districts, such as Central Cass, Devils Lake, Hankinson, Hillsboro, LaMoure, Oakes, and Valley City. Notice how they are all smaller towns. Many of these outdated buildings are in smaller communities that can't afford to build new schools, and a new school looks extremely attractive when families decide where to live. A new school can kickstart rebuilding a small town and keeping people in North Dakota. As a student, many of my friends say that when they have families, they don't want them to go to school in Valley City because of the facility. Schools are

a primary reason for North Dakota's loss of people and small growth. It is in your best interest to invest for all of us.

This legislation would be a saving grace for schools like mine and small-town communities. They need the state to stand up for them, which I ask you to do today. I urge a DO PASS recommendation from this committee. Thank you.

Carter Hass.