

House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee
February 7, 2025 HB 1437
Testimony in Opposition

Chairman Schauer & members of the House Government & Veterans Affairs Committee:

I strongly urge you to reject any legislation that eliminates or downgrades tenure at any type of institution in North Dakota.

Tenure is important to the success of higher education at all types of institutions, including community and technical colleges. Academic freedom is important not only at research universities, but in teaching-focused colleges as well – it just looks a little different. I understand this issue well as I have worked at Duke University (which I also attended as a student), Drexel University, the University of Chicago (which I also attended as a graduate student), the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and Bismarck State College.

Tenure plays a significant role in the recruitment and retention of quality faculty at Bismarck State College (BSC), Dakota College at Bottineau (DCB), Lake Region State College (LRSC), the North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS), and Williston State College (WSC). And such quality faculty are key to the education that students receive.

The stability of tenure-track faculty offers continuity as students navigate their years, supporting mentorship for students. These faculty also take root and contribute to their neighborhoods, their own children's schools, local nonprofits, municipal governments, and more. Our communities don't benefit as much from higher ed instructors who come and go. Stable, rooted faculty are healthy not just for the institutions they directly serve, but for their broader communities.

Community and technical college students share the needs of university students: They need to learn to think, speak, read, write, grasp math, and understand history at a level that supports full participation in society. Education is not merely a box to be checked for an occupation; it prepares us for citizenship and adult-level functioning. A revolving door of instructors who aren't full participants in campus or community life will never educate our young people the way that tenure-track faculty can.

Someone earning a technical degree still deserves great professors and great mentorship. Our entire community benefits when our young people can tackle the demands of adulthood and citizenship with a solid educational foundation. Diminishing tenure stunts the growth of the next generation because it downgrades their educational experience.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that an amended version of this bill is possible, and it might be less destructive of tenure than the initial draft. However, unless this legislation ensures a fair appeals process for tenure-track faculty not granted tenure and for tenured faculty who are dismissed, it will still harm the quality of tenure available at ND institutions.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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