

January 20th, 2025

Dear Chairman Ruby and members of the House Human Services Committee,

I write to you as an incredibly proud alumna and benefactor of the University of North Dakota and a member of North Dakota United which represents Faculty and Staff at UND to express my personal opposition to House Bill 1181 and ask your committee to give it a “do NOT pass” recommendation and vote NO on this bill.

At the culmination of my doctoral studies at the University of North Dakota and during the pomp and circumstance of my graduation the University’s Land Acknowledgement was read at the start of the ceremony.

“Today, the University of North Dakota rests on the ancestral lands of the Pembina and Red Lake Bands of Ojibwe and the Dakota Oyate - presently existing as composite parts of the Red Lake, Turtle Mountain, White Earth Bands, and the Dakota Tribes of Minnesota and North Dakota.

We acknowledge the people who resided here for generations and recognize that the spirit of the Ojibwe and Oyate people permeates this land. As a university community, we will continue to build upon our relations with the First Nations of the State of North Dakota - the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation, Spirit Lake Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.”

As I sat in my chair a few rows from the stage, this moment led me to reflect on the knowledge I had gained throughout the many years of my dissertation study. A greater understanding of the history of those First Nations and their sacred members, named Two Spirits. Two Spirits are individuals with both masculine and feminine presence who is either male-or female-bodied. Two Spirits can cross social gender roles, gender expression, and sexual orientation (Shotton et al., 2013). The name Two Spirit was embraced by Indigenous populations in the 1990s to split from the dehumanizing “berdache” identity that had been enforced by other ethnicities (“Two Spirited People of Manitoba” in Matthews-Hartwell, 20176). If we want to continue to build on relationships, we should look beyond what other ethnicities want and

not enforce laws such as this on the people of our First Nations, such as Two Spirits.

The reading of the land acknowledgment further connected me to my dissertation study, the one that allowed me to receive a terminal degree from a higher education institution in the state in which I was born and raised.

I struggled to find a topic to study and it was in teaching online at a local Tribal College that a student taught me what the firsthand experience was for someone who was prohibited from a simple name change and acknowledgment of how that student and their loved ones see them, for who they are.

I had students introduce themselves to each other, sharing their long and short term goals, talking about their educational goals, possibly moving away to complete their degrees so they could move back home and serve their community members. And I had one student who spent two paragraphs explaining why their name on their account didn't match the name they, their loved ones, and people closest to them referred to them as. Had that student been allowed to use their name and their pronouns, they would have had the same opportunity to share their excitement about the future with their classmates. It was out of compassion more so than understanding that I took on the task of creating my larger study.

I also serve as the chair for the LGBTQ Faculty and Staff Association at UND. This fall, I sent out a survey to members and I asked them to voluntarily respond to an impact survey. Fifteen members responded and those fifteen people have brought in approximately \$19,000,000 in outside funding to the University of North Dakota. Enacting laws that have a negative impact such as this one that makes North Dakota an unwelcoming state will make it very difficult to recruit, train, and retain the most gifted and talented individuals in their fields.

It is for these reasons, I respectfully ask your committee to give HB 1181 a "do NOT pass" recommendation and encourage committee members to vote NO on this legislation.

Sincerely,



Dr. Bridget Brooks