

From: Laura Ackerman

To: House Judiciary Committee

Subject: House Bill 1145, relating to displays of the ten commandments in state educational institutions and public schools

Date: January 11, 2025

My name is Laura Ackerman and I am resident of Mandan, North Dakota, residing in District 31. The purpose of my testimony is to urge the House Judiciary Committee to vote **no** on **House Bill 1145**.

This bill violates the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which directs the government to be neutral on religion or personal beliefs. The Ten Commandments is a religious document (with multiple versions) and reflects the beliefs of some people. Requiring it to be displayed in public institutions and schools subjects students to government-endorsed religious coercion, infringes on our right to religious freedom, and interferes with a parent's ability to direct their child's religious upbringing.

If this bill was about displaying the commandments or doctrine of many religions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc), for the purposes of educating people on the variety of religious beliefs, this would be a different matter. However, this bill chooses one version of the Ten Commandments as the official or favored version endorsed by the government. With this bill, the government would be providing preferential treatment towards one religious belief system, and making subordinate, those with differing religious beliefs and those that are agnostic or atheist.

I will also add that I do not oppose private educational institutions displaying religious documents. Public schools, however, are funded by public dollars and this is not how I want my tax dollars spent. Religious organizations and churches do not contribute taxes. I happily support public schools because they are subject to public accountability and cannot discriminate against who is allowed to attend.

If you respect the U.S. Constitution, religious freedom for all people, and less government infringement in our personal lives, you should reject this bill. Please focus on bills that promote equality, protect freedoms, wisely spend taxpayer dollars, responsibly manage our natural resources, and improve quality of life for all people.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,

Laura Ackerman