

January 13, 2025

VOTE NO on HB 1145 (Ten Commandments)

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Anastassiya Andrianova. I hold a PhD in Comparative Literature and am Full Professor of English at North Dakota State University, where I also served as Faculty Senate President in 2022-2023. I write on my own personal behalf, not on behalf of the university.

As a professor at one of our state's educational institutions under the control of the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education (SBHE), **I urge you to VOTE NO on proposed House Bill 1145**, "relating to displays of the ten commandments in state educational institutions and public schools."

I am a product of public schools: I went to secondary public schools. I earned a BA from the City College of New York and an MA, MPhil, and PhD from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. I have taught countless students in a myriad classrooms at various public institutions, including at Queens College, City College, Borough of Manhattan Community College (all part of the NYC public university system), and for over 11 years here at NDSU. **No classroom in my 20+ years of experience in academia had the ten commandments displayed.**

The Ten Commandments should NOT be displayed in public institutions of learning for the following fundamental reason: **that would be unconstitutional.**

Specifically, by mandating such "displays," HB 1145 would violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, commonly known as "the separation of church and state." The Establishment Clause protects freedom of religion by prohibiting the government from establishing a religion. A mandate to display a religious document in a public space could reasonably be construed as "establishment."

As such, HB 1145 would also **violate academic freedom**, defined as "the expression of diverse points of view by faculty, students and guests of the University, **free from interference** by administrators, SBHE members or other **government officials**," as per NDSU Policy 325 and SBHE Policy Manual, Section 401.1.

In addition, by mandating the displays of the ten commandments "in each classroom on the campus of each state educational institution under [SBHE] control and administration," **the legislature would be overstepping its power.** The SBHE, not the state legislature, is "the governing body for North Dakota's 11 public universities and colleges" that "is responsible for setting policy, advocacy, and overseeing the NDSU Extension Service, Agricultural Research Stations, and other organizations."

I strongly urge you to **Vote NO on House Bill No. 1145.**

Further, I urge you to redirect legislative efforts and taxpayer funds toward addressing tangible quality-of-life issues that impact all North Dakota residents.

Thank you for reading my testimony. Your thoughtful consideration is greatly appreciated.

Dr. Anastassiya Andrianova, PhD
Professor of English, North Dakota State University