

Catherine Benton
SB 2145
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition of HB1145.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. I urge a strong NO vote on House Bill 1145, which requires the display of the Ten Commandments in public educational settings.

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 its display 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 were 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. By privileging one religious belief system, the government would be providing preferential treatment towards it and subordinating those with differing beliefs or no religious beliefs at all.

The Ten Commandments are an important component of Christian religious belief and practice. However, there are many other residents of North Dakota who practice other religions or none, and who have their own texts, traditions, and values that are significant to them. By privileging Christian religious texts in the classroom, the State would infringe on their right to free exercise of religion and beliefs.

Additionally, public teachers are not trained and should not be expected to answer questions from students about these commandments, which may naturally arise. That is the purview of families, pastors, and faith communities. The State would infringe on our rights to teach and share our beliefs in appropriate ways by presuming to take on this role.

Public schools 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 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 the quality of life for all people.

Thank you for considering this testimony. Again, I urge you to vote NO on House Bill 1145. Please direct your efforts to legislation that serves and benefits the lives of all North Dakotans, irrespective of faith tradition or belief.

Your consideration is very much appreciated

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