

Testimony Before the House Judiciary Committee

HB 1145

January 14, 2024

Chair Klemin and members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Troy Kuntz, and I am an Elementary Library Media Specialist for the Dickinson Public Schools. My testimony today is in opposition to HB 1145, and I strongly urge the House Judiciary Committee to render a **Do Not Pass** recommendation for this piece of legislation.

As a Dickinson, ND local who attended the Dickinson Catholic Schools for K-12 education, I grew up in classrooms where the Ten Commandments were displayed, and I fully understand the historical, cultural, and religious significance that such displays may hold for some individuals. However, I am writing today to express my opposition to House Bill 1145, which mandates the display of the Ten Commandments in classrooms of public schools and state educational institutions.

1. As an elementary librarian, one of my primary responsibilities is to provide students with access to diverse perspectives and experiences of the world. This includes offering information and books on a wide range of topics, including world religions. Our schools serve students and families from various cultural, religious, and non-religious backgrounds. By mandating the display of one specific religious text, the state risks marginalizing students and families who do not share the beliefs represented by the Ten Commandments.

If we are to teach students about one religious document, such as the Ten Commandments, are we also going to include similar texts from other religions celebrated locally and globally, such as the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita, or the teachings of Buddha? Public schools should foster an inclusive environment where students feel welcomed and respected, regardless of their faith or beliefs. The mandated display of one specific religious text could undermine this inclusivity and inadvertently alienate students and families who do not adhere to that particular faith tradition.

2. Furthermore, I have concerns about the age-appropriateness of the Ten Commandments as a classroom display, particularly in elementary schools. In my role as a librarian, I regularly engage in discussions about what is appropriate to include in our library collections for young readers. If our library included books that focused on themes of "adultery" or "coveting thy neighbor's wife," I am confident that district administration and parents would raise concerns about the suitability of these topics for children. If such themes are not considered appropriate for children's literature, how can they be deemed appropriate for permanent display on classroom walls where young students are present every day?

As someone who grew up with the Ten Commandments displayed in my classrooms, I understand the perspective of those who support this bill. However, I believe that public schools have a responsibility to remain neutral on matters of religion and focus on creating an inclusive environment that respects and values the diversity of all students. House Bill 1145 has the potential to compromise that neutrality and inclusivity, and I respectfully urge you to oppose this bill.

For these reasons, Chair Klemin, and members of the Committee, I urge a **Do Not Pass** recommendation for HB 1145.

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