

Testimony of Cole Higlin
North Dakota Recreation & Park Association
To House Energy and Natural Resources Committee
In Opposition to HB 1588
Thursday, February 6, 2025

Chairman Porter and members of the Committee, my name is Cole Higlin, and I am the public policy chair of the North Dakota Recreation & Park Association (NDRPA). We represent more than 900 members, primarily park districts, and work to advance parks, recreation and conservation for an enhanced quality of life in North Dakota.

We oppose House Bill 1588. The implementation of this bill would create significant confusion and enforcement challenges for local park districts and their staff. Park districts oversee numerous public spaces, many of which are shared with schools and other organizations. For example, the Rough Rider Center in Watford City and the Williston Area Recreation Center share space with high schools and host elementary school programming at different times throughout the day. This bill, as written, would introduce ambiguity regarding when weapons are permitted on park district property, particularly in areas with multiple functions.

For instance, a facility may host both a school sporting event and a private event, such as a wedding or corporate gathering, on the same day. This overlap would create confusion over whether weapons should be allowed or prohibited at any given time.

Additionally, the bill would place an undue burden on staff, many of whom are students or young adults, requiring them to continually monitor and enforce complex, case-by-case decisions about whether weapons should be allowed, particularly during events where the distinction between public and private use of a facility is unclear.

In conclusion, we urge the committee to carefully consider the enforcement challenges, potential confusion, and safety concerns this bill would create. We request your support in opposing this legislation and encourage you to explore alternative approaches that better balance public safety with individual rights.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.