

SB 2003

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**NORTH DAKOTA
STUDENT ASSOCIATION**

THE VOICE OF THE STUDENTS



SB 2003

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Chair Vigesaa and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sammi Weber, and I am the current President of the North Dakota Student Association. I am here today to express my support for SB 2003 by outlining our legislative priorities.

The North Dakota Student Association (NDSA) is a student organization established in 1969 that is dedicated to ensuring that students have a voice in policy that affects Higher Education. The NDSA consists of delegates from each of the 11 public institutions that meet monthly to engage students in Higher Education policy in North Dakota. Our mission is to empower students, foster collaboration between students across campuses in the North Dakota University System, and to advocate on issues of higher education in support of access, affordability, quality, and the student experience.

A significant factor most individuals consider when deciding to pursue higher education is how much it is going to cost and if they can afford it. Recognizing this challenge, the North Dakota University System (NDUS) and the state legislature have done an impressive job keeping the cost of tuition down and attracting students to the state. During my term, I have visited 8 out of 11 of the public North Dakota institutions, and nearly every student I had the pleasure of speaking with stated that the low tuition and scholarships available were a deciding factor in choosing a North Dakota institution. Affordability has brought valuable diversity to North Dakota campuses with the inclusion of out-of-state and international students which has created an enriching educational experience for students, faculty, and staff throughout the university system. The diverse perspectives and welcoming campus environments both enhance and

encourage graduates to build their futures in North Dakota. The more positive experiences that students have, the more likely they are to stay in North Dakota, enriching the growing workforce and economy of the state.

Even with the affordable tuition and funding provided, many students still face financial challenges. They often have to work part-time or full-time jobs to afford necessities such as groceries, rent, and bills. In doing so, students must balance their school, work, and personal life. Students are less likely to struggle when they have adequate support and mental health resources near them. The majority of first year students are required to live on campus and may be unable to travel elsewhere to find support outside of their campus. If sufficient resources such as counseling, peer support groups, and telehealth are available to students through their institution, they will be more likely to utilize them and ultimately succeed in school. One of the biggest concerns raised to the NDSA by students is the low availability of mental health services to students. For some campuses, only a part-time counselor for over 1,000 students is available. For other, larger campuses, there is a growing need to expand their robust mental health services to include other resources such as social workers to address the needs of a larger student population. Expanding access to mental health services will ensure that all NDUS students have the support they need to thrive.

Without a doubt, the number one concern of students I have met at college campuses or delegates at NDSA meetings is housing. Whether it is the accessibility and affordability of off-campus housing, or the quality and maintenance of on-campus housing: it is clear that support is needed. For almost every NDUS campus, first-year students are required to live on campus. Students have often shared their concern for the quality of these outdated buildings as many of these residence halls were built in the 1960s or 70s with little to no renovation. This is of no fault to any institution due to the high cost of maintenance or renovation of these buildings. However, if the quality of these residence halls is low, or the institution does not offer preferred housing options for students like suite-style or single bed options over the traditional residence hall, students may choose to attend an institution outside of North Dakota where they will feel accommodated for and comfortable.

In order to support the 11 NDUS public institutions in these challenges through the next biennium, I would like to express my support for SB 2003.