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**Senate Bill 2392**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**February 11, 2025**

Chairman Elkin and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Connor Ferguson, and I serve as the Student Body President at the University of North Dakota (UND). The University of North Dakota currently educates over 14,000 students throughout the state and country. UND's Student Government has representatives from all nine academic colleges and is a group that is elected by students to represent their voices at the campus, local, and state level. I am here this morning to represent those voices and testify in opposition to SB 2392, relating to prohibited discriminatory practices. I want to ensure that the student perspective is considered and share the negative implications that this bill may have for higher education students in North Dakota.

At this time, when a student attends college in North Dakota, they are protected in their free speech rights and can listen to the perspectives of others, engage in critical dialogue around difficult concepts, and disagree with each other. For many students, college is the first time in which they are exposed to new ideas and create the foundation for the development of their worldview and beliefs. At UND, having critical conversations and expressing disagreement is not only accepted, but encouraged. By limiting what concepts are taught and the offices that can exist, it creates barriers toward free thinking by limiting the topics students are introduced to. When a student can learn differing viewpoints, worldviews, and engage in meaningful dialogue, they then can ask questions and engage in learning and discovery. Additionally, these open dialogues prepare students for the workforce in which they will encounter countless individuals who do not always agree with their viewpoints. If students are not equipped with the ability to have respectful conversations, challenge their current viewpoints, and take time to listen to others, the state is educating individuals who are unable to engage in original thinking.

As written, SB 2392 puts a serious burden on the University and our faculty to determine whether their language and course content are deemed “acceptable”. This restriction on speech is a violation of the first amendment and inhibits the free exchange of dialogue that is so important to the college experience. Because of this, we jeopardize academic freedom and the ability for our expert faculty to make decisions on the important educational topics for our students. The ability of faculty to freely determine their curriculum is essential to developing critical thinking skills in students. By requiring the submission of syllabi for public review, an undue burden is placed on the University System. Making all our syllabi public is a massive undertaking, and the lack of a fiscal note means that the labor and infrastructure cost will fall back on the University and the students.

Another effect of SB 2392 is its impact on the support services offices that UND offers for the benefit of its students. One support service that would be impacted with the passage of this bill is UND’s Pride Center which is a center for LGBTQIA2S+ life at UND that connects our campus community with student success opportunities and support resources. This center is open to all students and focuses on creating a welcoming and accepting community for all on UND’s campus. Recently, the Pride Center received testimonials, and the narratives tell a powerful story about the effect of the center. One first year student wrote, *“In my short time here at UND so far, the pride center has become something of a second home. It's a very wonderful place to hang out, socialize and do homework in a kind and welcoming space. This place has had an absolutely massive impact on me in a very short amount of time. The vast majority of those who are now my closest friends I have met at the pride center or at least it became a wonderful place for us to get to know each other. Outside of a robust social life, the pride center has given me so many academic and life opportunities, so much so, that my first ever job is working here at the pride center. The study table and academic challenges every semester offer great incentives to do well in class. The community is also very supportive and great at convincing you to go to class, even when you don't really want to. The pride center has become one of the most important aspects of my life here in Grand Forks. It is the best place to find a welcoming, loving, and supportive community.”* This student was able to find personal and academic success because of the Pride Center’s work, and they’re not the only one.

The University of North Dakota prides itself on being able to offer support services to a variety of groups within our campus community. We offer student disability resources, veteran and military affairs, different living and learning communities in UND housing, and so much more. This is done with the understanding that all of these groups are important and giving students the opportunity to find support for their identity is essential to making them feel welcomed. We all come from different backgrounds and that's what makes us so important. The ability to offer tailored assistance for different identity groups integral to UND's mission, and making sure that students are exposed to different backgrounds and worldviews helps to expand their horizons and prepare them for the workforce. By passing a bill which is designed to inhibit these identity-based spaces, we harm the students that identify with these groups, we take the opportunity to meaningfully engage with these groups from other students, and we revoke support services from people who may or may not be part of these groups. At UND, all students are welcome to access every support service offered to them. Our offices never turn a student in need away.

In closing, I want to take some time to share my personal experiences in the North Dakota University System. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to see and meet with members of different Pride Centers and Community & Belonging Centers. In all these spaces, I have seen a strong and welcoming community which actively invites other students regardless of their background. These centers do great work and strive to ensure that everyone who comes through their doors is helped. As students, we want to live and work in a state where our individual freedoms are not only protected but also respected. Furthermore, I have heard numerous faculty members express their concerns about the passing of this bill and their desire to move and teach elsewhere if it is passed. In order to recruit and retain students to be a part of North Dakota's workforce, economy, and livelihood, this bill should not be passed. Chairman Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee, I respectfully request a DO NOT PASS recommendation on SB 2392. Thank you for your time, and I am available to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Connor Ferguson