



SB 2392

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Chair Beard and members of the committee:

My name is Christopher Scott, and I am the current Policy, Advocacy and Research Director for the North Dakota Student Association. I am here to express the NDSA's opposition to SB 2392.

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.

My testimony will be focused on the student impact of this bill, particularly on diversity waivers, and the impact of removing diversity related centers that are eliminated at an institution of Higher Education. During the February 2025 NDSA General Assembly, the NDSA passed resolution NDSA-24-2425: A Resolution in Opposition to SB 2392: Regulation of Prohibited Discriminatory Practices. In addition to the academic impacts that SB 2392 would create, SB 2392 would also potentially discontinue the diversity waiver at institutions of Higher Education in North Dakota, and close diversity and pride centers across the students, impacting all students that these waivers, and centers provide for.

Typically, a diversity waiver is provided by the institution to an individual who comes from a disadvantaged background. This background could stem from a different ethnic background or living circumstances that may put them at a financial disadvantage when it comes to paying for higher education in North Dakota. The students that benefit from these waivers vary significantly. Some are single parents, first generation students, or low income. Others may be veterans or those with disabilities. There are approximately 700 students from across the University System that benefit from these waivers. The point of the waivers is to create an even playing field for all students to afford college.

With SB 2392, some of these waivers could be removed, placing the students that benefit from these waivers at risk of not being able to pay for the cost of attendance, which could then negatively impact retention rates across the NDUS and decrease the overall affordability of attending college in North Dakota. This goes counter to the NDSA's legislative priority of incentivizing students to attend NDUS institutions by increasing the affordability of the NDUS through supporting scholarships and grants comparable to others in the region and to workforce needs.

The removal of Diversity Waivers and other scholarships and grants impacted by SB 2392 would make North Dakota uncompetitive with other states in attracting both in state and out of state students to attend institutions in the state, those students instead opting to go to states where these waivers, scholarships, and grants are offered to them. If in state students leave the state due to college, there is a good chance that they will not move back to North Dakota after they complete college wherever they go, which then lowers North Dakota's intellectual capital, which is much needed, particular in areas where North Dakota is experiencing severe workforce shortages.

On a personal note, I was a recipient of the Diversity Waiver for 5 years while I attended Minot State University. As a student who had aged out the foster care system, this waiver greatly impacted my education and made it much more affordable to attend Minot State to complete my first degree, and reduced financial strains and stresses that I would have otherwise experienced without the waiver. It saved me approximately 20,000 dollars.

In addition to the potential removal of waivers, scholarships and grants, SB 2392 would also prohibit institutions from having an office, division, employment position or other unit of an

institution to implement, develop, plan or promote campus policies, procedures, practices, programs, or initiatives regarding prohibited discriminatory practices. In other words, SB 2392 would force institutions of Higher Education in North Dakota to close centers that enrich the campus community, such as pride centers and diversity offices.

The removal of these offices would impact students that greatly benefit from these spaces, and could potentially make these feel unwelcome to the state of North Dakota and to the campus community, negatively contribute to the mental health problems that many students face that these centers provide resources and environment to address and mediate, decreasing the retention rate of these students, and would also push students both in state and out of state to attend institutions of higher education outside of North Dakota.

Prior to this testimony, we reached out to some students that benefit from these spaces and some of their comments are included below:

Student 1: "I love this center. As a student, I feel seen and welcomed at this Center more than any other place here on campus. It's been a great place to meet people, get involved in the community and so much more! Not only is it a great place to learn things, meet new people but it also provides a great environment for effective learning. This Center has helped me out so much with my experience and transition here in college. The staff are the best and so welcoming and helpful to all students no matter what. This center is an impactful great place that is very inclusive and accepting."

Student 2: "I love the sense of belonging I get at the Center. I feel safe and seen and heard in this space because there are people that look like me and so they understand me. I also love the staff and all the help they've provided throughout my academic career. I genuinely think I wouldn't have made it through college without this Center."

Student 3: "I love the environment and the people. This Center hosts a lot of events which brings people out of their shells and allows us to meet people who we would otherwise probably never meet. I love the center space and the resources that are available through this place. It is a central place for me to get in touch with more people on campus. This center has helped with some many things that has played a huge role in the improvement of my mental health and academic well-being"

Student 4: “I love the community I feel when I am in there. They really work hard to make the Center feel like a third space. The diversity, ambiance of the room, and kindness of the people there makes it a vital campus organization. My words could not encompass all of what makes the center great, but it has brought unequalled benefit to the student body”

With these details covered, the NDSA opposes the removal of any DEI or related center that caters to the university community, and opposes the removal of any scholarships, grants or waivers that would be impacted if SB 2392 were to pass. The NDSA strongly opposes SB 2392 and would ask for a DO NOT PASS recommendation from the committee.