

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1143
HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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**By: Jim Upgren, Assistant Director, Office of School Approval and Opportunity
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Chairman Owens and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jim Upgren, Assistant Director in the Office of School Approval and Opportunity with the Department of Public Instruction. I am here on behalf of the department to speak in favor of HB 1143.

Article VIII, Section 1 of the North Dakota Constitution states that “A high degree of intelligence, **patriotism**, integrity and morality on the part of every voter in a government by the people being necessary in order to insure the continuance of that government and the prosperity and happiness of the people, the legislative assembly shall make provision for the establishment and maintenance of a system of public schools which shall be open to all children of the state of North Dakota and free from sectarian control. This legislative requirement shall be irrevocable without the consent of the United States and the people of North Dakota.” This means that one of the duties of our public school system is to promote patriotism and civic duty.

House Bill 1143 calls for each student to complete at least one patriotism project as part of their experience in elementary school, starting with the 2022-

2023 school year. The topic of each project is the student's choice. The purpose of these projects is to promote civic duty and, through exploration and inquiry, for students to understand the rights and responsibilities of living in a democratic society. These rights and responsibilities include the right to vote, the responsibility to be an informed citizen, and the responsibility to contribute to the betterment of the community. The bill calls for the department to write guidance for the schools regarding standards and implementation of the patriotism project.

In recent years STEM skills (relating to science, technology, engineering, and math) have been prioritized in our educational system. According to a November 2020 study, our schools spend \$54 per student on STEM education, but only 5 cents per student on civics education. While I will not argue that STEM skills are not important (because they are), it is imperative that we fund civics education (which is part of our state constitution) at a higher percentage than one one-thousandth of something that is not listed in our state constitution.

We all know that students living in the 21st Century are no longer satisfied with reading about what others have done or are doing. Rightly so, they are now expecting that they can “do” and practice the things they are learning about. That is how real, long-lasting, and meaningful learning takes place.

Taking an interest in civic duty at a young age will lead to a greater chance that those students will be informed and involved in their communities when they get

older. The purpose of HB 1143 is to encourage students to get involved in their communities, be informed of the issues, and understand their vital role in their communities as citizens. Students must realize that they cannot be only consumers of good government, but must also be good contributors to this state and nation as good citizens.

Not all young people have these opportunities for practice and action. For schools already doing these types of projects, this bill changes nothing, as there is no added burden if these projects are already being done. But passage of this bill will send a clear message to those schools who are not making civics and patriotism an integral part of their teaching that the Legislature and the state of North Dakota expects that schools deliver the expectations of the North Dakota Constitution with the funding provided to all public schools in North Dakota.

Another important piece of HB 1143 is in Section 1 on page 2, lines 1 through 6. This allows NDDPI to work with veteran's and other civic oriented local organizations to support these projects. Often these organizations reach out to NDDPI with an offer to help fund and support student and teacher patriotic activities. This bill would allow us to accept that assistance, and would also allow local school districts to do the same.

Chairman Owens and Members of the Committee that concludes my prepared testimony and I will stand for any questions that you may have.