

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2021

House Education Committee

HB 1220

Dear Rep. Owens and committee members,

My name is Sarah Elmquist Squires, and I'm representing the North Dakota Newspaper Association. We oppose the portion of the bill that would allow the State Board of Higher Education to hire or fire a commissioner in a meeting that is closed to the public.

Higher education affects families of all stripes in North Dakota – whether you've got a child or grandchild planning for post-secondary education, or you yourself are thinking about going back to school. College, and its cost, can change the trajectory of a family for generations. The economics of higher ed are important to the cities where the state's colleges are located, the state as a whole, and also in family budgets discussed at the dinner table. Because high education's impact and importance is so broad, the significance of the commissioner's work and oversight of that office is profound.

The public has always had access to these meetings, and the legislature has rejected this proposal in the past and affirmed the importance of a transparent process when it comes to selecting our state's top higher education official. We ask that you again affirm the importance of openness and transparency of these decisions, and reject this portion of the bill.

We appreciate the sections of the bill that clarify notices and the board's committees' status.

We respectfully ask that you consider amending the section that is problematic by striking page 1, line 24: "the commissioner of higher education, or" and renumber accordingly.

Thank you so much for considering this change, and thank you for all the important work you do.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Elmquist Squires

North Dakota Newspaper Association