

The Honorable Members of the House Education Sub Committee  
North Dakota House of Representatives  
State Capitol  
600 East Boulevard  
Bismarck, ND 58505

**Re: HB 1356**

Dear Representatives,

I am writing to urge your positive support of House Bill 1356, which would essentially allow very specifically defined, patriotic societies, such as Boy Scouts and the Girls Scouts, to speak to students during regular school hours at each public school during the first quarter of each academic school year to explain how students may participate or join. The school principal would still dictate the time, place and manner of the presentation. I believe that the successful passage of this bill is important to individuals, families, schools, communities, and the state.

Before covering the specific benefits, I would like to provide some background on recent academic research that underscores the personal and public value of Scouting. In 2015 Dr. Richard Lerner and a team of researchers from Tufts University's (Boston) Center for Applied Positive Youth Development finished a 2<sup>1/2</sup>-year longitudinal study of 1800 Cub Scouts and 400 non-Cub Scouts in the Philadelphia Area. The purpose of the study was to analyze the effects of Scouting. The study was significant, because, 1) it was **not commissioned** by the Boy Scouts of America, and 2) it proved that Scouting indeed builds character.

Study participants were surveyed 5 times in 2 ½ years. Importantly, the first survey conducted in 2012 found *no significant difference* between Scouts and non-Scouts. If the Scouts had entered the program with unusually high character attributes, one could argue that Scouting merely *attracts* better young people, rather than *making* them. Instead, researchers were confident their study began with groups on equal footing. Over the course of the next 2<sup>1/2</sup> years, the scout group began to change in significant ways from the non-scout control group.

First, the Scouts made significant gains in character traits— cheerfulness, kindness, hopefulness, future expectations, trustworthiness, helpfulness, and obedience. Second, the Scouts were more likely than non-scouts to embrace *positive social Values*. For example, when the scout control group was asked “What’s most important you?”, they were more likely to respond with answers such as “helping others”, or “doing the right thing”. In contrast, the non-scout control group was more likely to respond with “being smart”, “being the best”, or “playing sports”. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with those answers, but it does suggest that Scouts are more likely than non-scouts to be concerned about others and their community. I reference the Tufts Camp Study because it provides academic support for what we always knew, anecdotally - Scouting builds character and civic responsibility.

It is easy to see how individual students and families would benefit from improving in character attributes such as cheerfulness, kindness, hopefulness, future expectations, trustworthiness, helpfulness, and obedience. However, I

would suggest that schools as well. Regarding Schools, growth in these specific character traits would likely result in less truancy, less disciplinary violations, and better than average academic performance. It would also result in increased participation in extra-curricular activities such as clubs, band, student government, and sports. I have the pleasure of reading every Eagle Scout Application every year. Without exception, In addition to Scouting, these young men and now young women lead in their school clubs, sports teams, band, work and church programs as well. They tend to be honor roll students and have robust plans for their future that include College, the Military, and / or public service. I am confident that the 5000+ young men and young women that make up the Northern Lights Council membership, collectively, make their schools better, not worse.

The community and the State benefit from Scouting as well. For example, in 2019 Scouts in the Northern Lights council delivered 71,735 hours of community service including, but not limited to, collecting, and distributing over 85,000 pounds of food to Community Food banks. In addition, over 133 Eagle Scout Service projects were conducted with a minimum of 8,000 hours of community service alone. This does not include the 1,000's of undocumented service hours freely given by our volunteer leaders and parents. The Independent Sector values volunteer time at \$27.20 per hour. At this rate, our 71,735 hours of community service is valued at \$1,951,192. If this "contribution" were removed from our various communities, we would all feel the loss.

For Scouting to grow, we need to be able to make a brief presentation in schools each year. We are completely mindful of the burden that schools shoulder educating young people. We do not want to detract from that mission in any way. In fact, we support it. And, as I have showed, Scouting involvement reinforces the lessons taught in school. Unfortunately, most of the largest school districts in the state have a standing policy that bars all "non-school" groups from making any kind of presentation. In addition, some schools have even barred distributing recruitment fliers for what they call "non-school" activities. They rely on electronic newsletters or announcements that "fliers are available in the office if anyone wants them." This simply does not work.

The Northern Lights Council's Year end membership has dropped significantly over the past 5 years as schools have systematically barred presentations through policy. For example, our 2015 membership was 9,572. By 2019 it had dropped (-1,856) or 19% to 7,716. The primary factor between 2015 and 2019 was a lack of School Access. To illustrate, our average fall recruitment in 2015 was 1200+ new members. In 2019 it was just under 800. I am not including 2020 numbers because we did not attempt a major recruitment drive due to Covid-19. Regardless, it should be easy to see that lack of school access is hurting Scouting.

As I stated earlier, we are not trying to be a burden on schools. However, we believe that there is a viable "middle ground". We do not believe that a 5-minute presentation at the beginning of the school year would place an undue burden on instructional time. Especially, when the school Principal would rightly control both the "Time" and "Manner" in which the presentations would be conducted. In fact, we are not necessarily asking to be in classrooms as our presentations could be made during previously scheduled non instructional times. Examples include presentations in

cafeterias during lunch or on the tail end of an existing school assembly. We are simply asking for an opportunity to present. I truly hope that you agree.

I am an Eagle Scout and the Father of an Eagle Scout. I know first-hand the added value that Scouting brings to the young women and young men who join either the Boy Scouts of America or Girl Scouts USA. My life was changed because of Scouting as was my son's. I assure you that I read that same sentiment in almost every Eagle Application that I sign. However, I and most of the scouts that I know of, may never have heard about the program without a short presentation that was done during school at the end of an assembly, cafeteria, or 5 minutes in a classroom.

I hope that you will look favorably on HB 1356. I believe that the future of Scouting depends on it. Please feel free to follow up with any questions. My email is [richard.mccartney@scouting.org](mailto:richard.mccartney@scouting.org). My cell phone is 701.552.1822.

Sincerely,

Richard E. McCartney  
Scout Executive