

HB 1356**Testimony for the N.D. House Education Committee, Chairman Mark Owens****January 1st, 2021**

Chairman Owens and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Jason Benson and I am testifying in support of House Bill 1356. Besides being a 31-year member of the National Guard with multiple overseas deployments and being a County Engineer, I have also served for more than 14 years as a volunteer leader for the Northern Lights Council, BSA. Growing up in Glenburn<ND I was introduced to Cub Scouts in second grade. When my family moved to Jamestown, I continued my scouting journey, culminating with earning my Eagle Scout badge.

Throughout my time as a Scout, I learned patriotism, leadership, outdoor skills, and the Scouting values of being Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, and Reverent. These are all characteristics we would like to see in our friends, neighbors, and coworkers. These are also the characteristics that we would like to see in our children.

Since 2007 I have served in West Fargo as a Cub Master, Den Leader, Assistant Scout Master, Committee Chair, and District Commissioner for Scout BSA Troops and Cub Scout Packs. As a member of the West Fargo Exchange Club, I also serve as the Exchange Club's representative to Pack 234, the Cub Scout Pack sponsored by the Exchange Club. As a leader and parent of Scouts I have seen the impact of Scouting on our community. The Packs and Troops I've been involved with have volunteered thousands of hours to support services projects in our community, collecting items for the food pantry, fall yard clean up for the elderly, and attending Veteran's Day and Memorial Day services.

These Scout groups also develop youth leaders that are dedicated to our communities, State, and Nation once they leave Scouting. In my Troop alone, we have produced more than 20 Eagle Scouts in the last 12 years. Our Scouts continue to serve in their communities and many have chosen into military service in either active duty or in the National Guard. In these past 12 years our Troop has also graduated officers from the Air Force Academy and Naval Academy and have two Eagle Scouts currently attending the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the Air Force Academy.

As you can see, Scouts BSA has an outstanding record of developing youth of character with values that support our communities and State. Over the years it has become more challenging to introduce youth to Scouting. One of the major challenges is the lack of contact with the youth of our communities. There was a time when access for Scout leaders to schools was welcomed as Cub Masters would attend back to school nights or do class room visits at the elementary schools to introduce kids to Scouting. Unfortunately, as time has passed, these opportunities have gone away and access to many schools is no longer available. Over the years I've often heard parents or kids say they wished they had heard about Scouting earlier and that maybe they would have joined.

I understand that there are many great youth sports and other youth activities that you may feel are competing with Scouting. But you would be wrong. Scout doesn't compete with other activities; it compliments those activities. Many of our Scouts are active in sports, music, academics, and other school activities. As a Scout leader I encourage our Scouts to be involved in other activities and I understand that it's also teaching Scouts leadership and time management. Again, Scouting doesn't compete, it compliments school sports and activities.

As an Eagle Scout, Scout Leader, and Community Leader, I encourage you to support Scouting and approve HB 1356 to allow patriotic youth organizations access to schools to provide students with information about Scouts BSA and other character building, patriotic youth organizations.