

CONCERNED
WOMEN *for* AMERICA
LEGISLATIVE ACTION COMMITTEE

March 22, 2021
Senate Education Committee
Testimony in Support of HB 1503

Chairman Senator Donald Schaible and members of the committee, I am Linda Thorson, State Director of Concerned Women for America (CWA) of North Dakota, testifying for Concerned Women for America Legislative Action Committee. At [CWA](#), we are working to see the protection and preservation of religious liberty as provided in the United States Constitution.

I am here today on behalf of our North Dakota members in support of HB 1503, which clarifies the North Dakota Century Code relating to free speech policies of institutions and students' rights to free speech, assembly, and expression. Also clarified in this legislation is the free association provision of the U.S. Constitution. An institution may not discriminate against a student organization based on a requirement of the organization that leaders or voting members of the organization adhere to the organization's viewpoints and be committed to the organization's mission (15- 10.4-02(4)(h) as amended).

This legislation is a forward-thinking approach to ensure the protection of faculty and students' right to religious liberty and freedom of speech which have been infringed upon on campuses across the nation. The adoption of a state-wide campus policy for all public colleges and universities under the control of the state board of higher education shows a firm commitment by the state of North Dakota to the protection of free speech rights for students and faculty. It also ensures an institution may not discriminate against a student organization with respect to a benefit available to other college organizations.

The Vice-Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs of the North Dakota University System, Lisa Johnson, [testified in opposition to HB 1503](#) and said this legislation is not needed (in North Dakota). However, Rep. Claire Cory, a senior at the University of North Dakota, told [kxnet.com](#), [free speech violations](#) occur, "I do think there's room for improvement because free speech is a really big issue. A lot of the times, people are afraid to speak out because of their grades, and they're worried their professors are going to retaliate."

The American Center for Law & Justice (ACLJ) defends religious freedom on campuses across America. They have represented [students](#) who have been punished – receiving failing grades, or being downright expelled for viewpoints expressed through speech, including religious convictions. The ACLJ successfully defended a conservative Christian [professor](#) denied a promotion because of his free speech. In another case, the ACLJ successfully defended a Christian [campus ministry](#) from attempts to prohibit the use of faith-based criteria in hiring decisions.

Under the Constitution, students and faculty do not lose their First Amendment rights when they walk through the doors of a university. [Clubs of all faiths](#) bring vibrancy and diversity of belief, opinion, and experience, creating a more robust university environment to engage in the free exchange of ideas. That is at the heart of what a university is meant to be.

On behalf of our North Dakota members, we support HB 1503 and urge your **“Do Pass” vote**. Campuses across the nation have enacted policies that infringe on First Amendment rights. House Bill 1503 clarifies and ensures policies at public colleges and universities in North Dakota are [constitutional](#).