

Alyx Schmitz in support of HB 1503

Chairman Klemin, members of the committee, my name is Alyx Schmitz and I am a December 2020 graduate of North Dakota State University. I am here to voice my support for House Bill 1503, the bill that protects college students' free speech in North Dakota.

Colleges are meant to be places where students can hear varying viewpoints freely and openly. One of the reasons I chose to attend NDSU is because I felt that my rights and opinions would be protected. I have friends who attend universities in other states as close as Minnesota, who have told me stories of when their free speech was suppressed because of university policy. As we all know, many trends or events across the United States create a ripple effect from the coasts to the Midwest. In North Dakota, we have the opportunity to be proactive by passing this bill. By passing this legislation, the State Board of Higher Education, a body of citizens appointed, not elected, cannot enact policy that hinders free speech. You can do a quick Google search and see countless stories across the United States where students from a political or religious viewpoint were silenced by their institutions for sharing a perspective that the administrators or professors did not like or agree with.

College is supposed to be a time when students can explore a new sense of independence and learn more about how to form ideas and articulate thoughts. Being able to openly express opinions is a freedom protected by the United States Constitution, a document which applies to college campuses. This bill would preserve constitutional freedoms and ensure that fear does not curb or inhibit the way that college students speak and the impact that student organizations have on campus. This bill would create a foundation of freedom of speech for students that cannot be taken away.

The State Board of Higher Education's policies almost discriminated against the operations of political clubs by not allowing them to receive funding from universities. The current policies in place would have allowed the Board to deny funding to political student organizations. As the former vice president of NDSU College Republicans, I know first-hand that university funding is necessary for the clubs to function and without these funds, the club would not have been able to expand our reach and generate our impact on our members and on campus. This is true for all student organizations affiliated with politics or political issues, including college democrats.

Lastly, I would like to share my support for a section of the policy that would eliminate 'free speech zones,' and rather allow free speech everywhere on campus. I have never understood the concept of 'free speech' zones. There are no such things as 'free speech' states or counties in America, so why do college campuses get to choose where free speech can or cannot exist? This limits students from openly expressing their views with one another and supports the

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notion that free speech is something we do not have the right to, but rather are granted when it's convenient.

It makes me worried to hear when campus policy administrators are fearful of this bill. If they believe that there are no complaints of free speech by students and that their policies protect most of what is in this bill, why are they opposed to it? They clearly are concerned with students having full rights, as granted by the US Constitution, that all people in America have that no administrator, board, or campus can ever take away.

This is why I respectfully request a do pass of HB 1503. I stand for any questions you might have.