

Senate Appropriations- Education and Environment Division
Public Hearing on SB 2013

A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation for defraying the expenses of the department of public instruction, the state library, the school for the deaf, and North Dakota vision services - school for the blind; and to provide an exemption.

January 24, 2023

Testimony of
Shannon Sorenson
Secondary Social Studies Teacher

Good afternoon, Chairman Sorvaag and members of the committee. My name is Shannon Sorenson and I teach Government, AP Government, and US History at a high school in Bismarck. I am here today in support of SB 2013. More specifically, I am here to ask you to support the increase request in the DPI budget for the passthrough grant that benefits Humanities ND.

I have been involved with the We the People program since the summer of 2018. I could stand before you today and tell you about how beneficial this has been for my students, which I am more than happy to do should you have any questions regarding student outcomes. However, I would like to focus my testimony today on the benefits this money would bring to teachers. I can say with 100% certainty that this program has been the best professional development I have received since beginning my teaching career in 2012. There is no other professional development offered to Social Studies teachers in ND that improves content knowledge, fosters statewide and nationwide networking, and improves content specific teaching practices the way the We the People program does. The funding that Humanities ND receives from the ND DPI passthrough grant helps make this possible.

While many teachers receive pedagogy based professional development through their individual school districts, we seldom, if ever, receive content specific training. We the People does that, and it has transformed my teaching in many ways. Every summer I have been fortunate enough to attend at least one summer institute that provides teachers with the opportunity to work with and learn from nationally respected scholars, historians, and political scientists. In recent years I have also served as a mentor for the program, and I have been involved in many discussions on how to continue to improve these trainings and make this professional development accessible to more teachers throughout the state. Some of these possibilities include online opportunities, mentor programs for new teachers, and national training opportunities, among others. Budget constraints provide the biggest hurdle when it comes to expanding the program to provide these kinds of opportunities and serve more teachers in ND. I firmly believe the best way to continue to improve civic education in the state of ND is to support programs like We the People that focus on arming teachers with the training and content knowledge they need to facilitate critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, and civil discourse in the classroom.

Therefore, I urge you to support the increase request in the Department of Public Instruction budget passthrough grant portion of SB 2013.

I'd like to thank you for your time this afternoon Chairman Sorvaag and members of the committee. Your consideration of this matter is sincerely appreciated.