

Testimony of Representative Finley-DeVill

In support of House Bill 1565

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Representative Lisa Finley-DeVill. I represent District 4A, which includes, MHA Nation. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB 1565, which aims to establish a grant program to help tribally controlled schools in North Dakota cover the costs of educating nonbeneficiary students. Non-beneficiary students are defined as “those who are neither enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe nor biological children of tribal descendants.”

Tribally controlled schools play an important role in serving Native American students, but they also educate many non-Native children. Some Native American children may not meet the specific blood quantum requirements necessary for enrollment in their tribes, but they still live in Native communities and attend these schools. Additionally, non-Native children also attend tribally controlled schools. These schools offer a unique, culturally enriched environment where students learn about Native traditions, history, and language, while receiving a quality education.

In my research I found that on the MHA Nation, Mandaree School currently serves 13 nonbeneficiary students, Twin Buttes School serves 12 nonbeneficiary students and expects that number to double by 2026 when their new school opens. White Shield School currently has 24 nonbeneficiary students. These numbers reflect a growing need for financial support to help these schools manage the additional costs of educating nonbeneficiary students.

HB 1565 ensures that all students attending tribal school, whether Native American or non-Native, have access to the resources and support they need to succeed. The grant program will help cover the costs of educating nonbeneficiary students, making sure they receive the same high-quality education as their peers. Nonbeneficiary students often do not qualify for the same funding as Native American students, and this bill addresses that gap by providing necessary resources.

Tribal schools face unique funding challenges, as they are primarily funded to educate Native American students. The additional costs of educating nonbeneficiary students can strain their budgets, which is why this grant program is needed. By providing targeted funding for these schools, we help ensure that they can continue offering a rich educational experience for all students, without sacrificing the quality of education for Native American children.

Another important benefit of these schools is the opportunity for non-Native students to learn about Native American culture and heritage. Tribally controlled schools offer a curriculum that incorporates Native American traditions, languages, and history—something that is not found in other schools in the state. Non-Native students attending these schools have a unique opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of Native American culture, which promotes greater respect and cooperation between different communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration, I ask that you give HB 1565 a Do Pass recommendation.