



Testimony for the 69th Legislative Assembly – House Education Committee

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Bill: HB1603

Position: In Support

Dear Chairman Schauer and Members of the House Government and Veteran Affairs Committee,

My name is Andy Armacost, and I serve as the President of the University of North Dakota. I'm here to speak in support of House Bill 1603 sponsored by Representative Collette Brown.

I appear before you today to quickly share our experiences. The University of North Dakota has spent the last three years heavily involved in the repatriation of Native American ancestors and other items by working alongside Tribal Nation from across the state, the region, and the nation.

This work is required under federal law, in particular the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act, which was signed in 1990 and revised most recently in January of 2024. NAGPRA places specific expectations upon museums, cultural institutions, and universities to return ancestral remains and artifacts to Tribal Nations. The recent revision broadens the expectations placed upon institutions.

The single largest barrier to this work is the expense incurred by state agencies and, more importantly, by the Tribal Nations within state of North Dakota. At UND, we know first-hand the expense of repatriation, including the cost of hiring the appropriate cultural resources consultants, hiring technical experts, and covering the travel expenses of tribal partners and team members. Keep in mind, we are doing this work for actions taken by UND members dating back to the very founding of UND in the late 1800s.

Other institutions in our state are facing and will continue to face the need to repatriate ancestors and other materials under NAGPRA. Our Tribal Nations will be at the center of this time-consuming and exhausting work. Establishing a repatriation fund will enable this work to happen quickly, accurately, and respectfully.

It is the state's responsibility to cover these expenses and to expedite actions that will bring Native American ancestors and artifacts back to their homes. I must be clear, UND is not seeking the use of the proposed fund. Rather, I am here to verify the need and to support a solution that will allow this sacred and vital work to happen.

Finally, I offer my public apology to the leaders from our five federally recognized tribes and to tribal leaders across the nation. This is but one way that we can atone for the past.

Please, again, accept my strong support for a "Do Pass" on this important bill.