



North Dakota House of Representatives

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Chairman Warrey and members of the Industry, Business and Labor Committee,

I am Representative Matt Heilman from North Dakota's seventh legislative district in Bismarck. I come before you today to testify in favor of HB 1150. This legislation is to undo the repeal of HB 1097 from the 2019 Legislative Session. Many have asked why the bill language is a bit odd and that is because this was existing state law prior to the repeal. Throughout the bill it explicitly lays out who is restricted and who is not. What prompted me to introduce this legislation was an article from Fr. Dominic Bouck at the University of Mary. Fr. Bouck wrote a great article in 2019 about how it was a mistake for North Dakota to repeal blue laws. Prior to reading his article, I did not know how critical blue laws are. There are numerous benefits to having blue laws and I will also address some of the criticisms.

The first benefit to blue laws is rest and recovery. Employees are working many long and exhausting hours throughout the week. Employees having additional time to rest can improve their mental health, which is a big problem in 2025, and their overall productivity. I have experienced this before as a worker and I know many others have as well. I firmly believe our purpose in life goes beyond working and not knowing rest.

The second benefit is that it incentivizes community and family time. People will have more time set aside to engage with their family members and engage in different community activities. We live in a culture that is hyper focused on capitalism, material wealth and looking at most issues through a purely economic lens. There are more important matters in life than

just a balance sheet. To be clear, I am not against capitalism at all. It has benefited us a lot but there is a balance between work and leisure.

The third benefit is for people who are religious. The bill lists the Sabbath as Sunday or a person who in good faith observes a day other than Sunday as the Sabbath. I worked retail as my first job and worked retail before and after the blue laws were repealed in 2019. Anybody who has worked retail can tell you that asking for Sunday off or merely Sunday morning off is no easy task. We live in one of the most prosperous places in the entire world. People should not have to jump hurdles to practice their religion. It is unreasonable, unfair, and not charitable to tell people to simply find another job or to deal with it.

One of the other benefits of blue laws is to help address the workforce shortage. Aside from "property tax" and "school choice," workforce shortage is probably the term I hear the most in politics. This is not an issue solved overnight. Generally speaking, if we want to attract more workers, we need to be offering better wages, benefits and policies that empower the working class.

There are some drawbacks to this legislation. One of those drawbacks is the revenue being lost for different businesses. I looked up the operating hours of a retail chain in Bismarck and they are open 82 hours for all seven days combined. If this bill were to pass, they would be down to 80 hours in a week. I believe this is a small sacrifice to empower the working class to enjoy the benefits of a few hours off every Sunday.

The other criticism of blue laws is customer convenience. There may be some inconveniences, but the convenience of having time to rest, be with family, and practice religion is far more valuable than the convenience of shopping for a watch on a Sunday morning.

Many have addressed concerns over the different businesses impacted by this bill. We could probably nitpick the bill for a long time over the different businesses impacted. However, section three allows many types of businesses to operate in their usual manner. I am open to amendments and I'm sure there are groups who have amendments to offer.

It is important for people to rest, recover, spend time with family, and to practice their religion. I will leave you with this quote from Josef Pieper which he wrote in *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*: “Of course the world of work begins to become—threatens to become—our only world, to the exclusion of all else. The demands of the working world grow ever more total, grasping ever more completely the whole of human existence.”