

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Nathaniel Smith. I am a resident of District 47 in Bismarck and work as a professional librarian for a state agency. I am submitting this written testimony in opposition to HB 1064 as currently written. Please note that I am submitting this testimony solely as a private citizen.

Section 7, paragraph 1 of the bill requires that out of state institutions offering online postsecondary degrees in North Dakota be members of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA). The testimony in favor of this bill says that this requirement is to ensure a minimum standard of quality. In my opinion, however, this language is too narrow. Whether or not an institution is a member of a particular agreement should not be the only reason they can offer distance education in our state.

There are many institutions that offer high-quality programs that are not members of SARA. Most notably, the state of California, which is the largest postsecondary market in the country, is not a SARA member. According to the University of California System's Office of the President, the reason for this is that many California policymakers believe that SARA standards do not offer sufficient protections to students enrolled in distance education.

I personally am aware that one of the best professional library science programs in the country is online-only and is offered by a California school, San Jose State University. I know two North Dakota librarians who got their Master of Library and Information Science degrees at San Jose. One is so proud of his experience he even has the university's license plate frame on his car. If I wanted to continue my professional education, San Jose is also one of the only programs that offers a post-Master's certificate for librarians online, and it is far and away the highest quality such program. Limiting offerings to just SARA institutions takes away that choice, and others like it. I am not able to comment on other California offerings outside of my field, but because the market is so large it stands to reason that there must be other examples besides this one.

Institutions in Canada or other foreign countries also would not be able to participate under the current language of Section 7, because SARA is a US-only consortium. I don't know the answer to this question, but I think it's worth asking how many North Dakota residents are enrolled in distance programs in Canada. UND's website does say that they have students from 6 Canadian provinces enrolled, so there must be some that go the other way.

Distance education students are often working adults, career changers, or other nontraditional students who cannot attend a traditional program. The North Dakota University System does not offer all programs, and not all institutions that offer these programs are members of SARA. I encourage the committee to continue to offer North Dakota residents as much consumer choice as possible for distance degrees by revising Section 7 paragraph 1 to include SARA-equivalent

institutions such as the California Board of Higher Education that are not SARA members, or by deleting the SARA requirement entirely. Please allow North Dakotans to keep as many distance education opportunities as possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.