

Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, my name is Bryan Pechtl, from Bismarck, and I'm here in support of House Bill 1479.

I am a former social studies teacher, and now is someone who conducts outreach to social studies teachers throughout the state and conducts a podcast on civics in North Dakota. The need is greater than ever to encourage our students, and all citizens of our state, to commemorate the work of the drafters of the state constitution in 1889 and of the support by voters, who ratified the constitution on October 1, 1889 by a vote of 27,441 to 8,107.

Study of our state constitution beyond eighth grade is virtually non-existent in our schools today. Both in the public and in schools, we focus heavily, and justifiably so, on our federal Constitution. But there is little time to focus on the founding document of our state. Comparing our state constitution versus federal, I would guess that many of us don't realize our state constitution:

- Is about 17,500 words versus just over 4,500 words in the U.S. Constitution.
- Consists of 16 articles versus 8 in the U.S. Constitution.
- Has been amended 167 times versus 27 at the federal level.

Nationally, our civics scores are very low and in decline. Only about 66% of American adults can name the three branches of government. And data from the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP testing, show only 22% of eighth grade students are considered 'proficient' in American civics. We have no measure regarding North Dakota civics. Perhaps it is because for every \$50 we spend on STEM education, we spend \$0.50 on civics education. Solving the civics proficiency problem is going to take long-term solutions and a dedicated effort. Maybe this bill recognizing our state constitution can constitute a small, first step towards increasing civics awareness in our state among ALL residents.

I urge a 'Do Pass' recommendation from this committee.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.