

**HB 1350 – Testimony for Finance & Taxation Committee Meeting, 1/25/2021
Laurie Garbel, Williston Public School District #1**

Good Morning Chairman Headland, Vice Chairman Steiner and all of the members of the Finance & Taxation Committee participating this morning. My name is Laurie Garbel and I am currently a board member for Williston Public School District #1 and was the chairman of the YES Committee for the two bond referendums voted on in 2019 for that district. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1350.

The YES Committee for the January 8, 2019 bond referendum was comprised of long-standing community members, a former state legislator and a small group of young professionals. That effort resulted in a 58.5% vote in favor of the proposed bond. For the April 9, 2019 bond referendum, we added a larger group of young professionals and parents, and a local marketing “guru” in our community. That effort resulted in a 59.5% vote in favor of the same bond proposal that had been offered in January. I cried that night, not because I was now the chair of a committee that had failed twice, I cried for all of the young people who wanted to make the school system and our community a better place for their kids. Their enthusiasm and commitment were the encouragement I had needed to take on the task a second time.

I am a firm believer that no matter how small your role may be as a leader in the bigger picture of politics, there is always a benefit to looking back at what worked and what did not in preparation for the future. For the April bond, we identified our target market and the product being offered. We focused on the young families in our community and the bond proposed would have helped alleviate the capacity issues our district had been dealing with for years as a result of the phenomenal growth in our area due to the most recent oil boom. The projected growth of our student population at this time has slowed due to the impact of Covid-19 and the associated downturn in the oil & gas industry. Even so, our enrollment numbers have remained fairly consistent. The new board for the “Williston Basin School District #007” will inherit the same issues that were dealt with by WPSD #1 and Williams County School District #8 which include capacity and the cost of deferred maintenance on existing infrastructure. Other districts in the state are no doubt dealing with one or both of these issues and I would like to thank Representative Richter, Representative Hatlestad, Representative Longmuir and Senator Bekkedahl for submitting HB 1350 as a tool for future bond referendum efforts.

No matter what percentage is required to pass a bond, each community really has to evaluate what their priorities are for investing in the future and how to bring their constituents together collaboratively to support those priorities. There are other bills pending this session that will address funding for construction of new schools. We all know balancing the budget this session will be tough due to the current economy in our state and nation. I respectfully request a DO PASS for HB 1350 as a show of your support for those communities who will move forward despite those uncertainties. Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this legislative process.