

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1143  
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**March 3, 2021**

**By: Jim Upgren, Assistant Director, Office of School Approval and Opportunity  
701-328-2244**

**North Dakota Department of Public Instruction**

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Chairman Schaible and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jim Upgren, Assistant Director in the Office of School Approval and Opportunity with the Department of Public Instruction. I am here on behalf of the department to speak in favor of HB 1143.

Article VIII, Section 1 of the North Dakota Constitution states that “A high degree of intelligence, patriotism, integrity and morality on the part of every voter in a government by the people being necessary in order to insure the continuance of that government and the prosperity and happiness of the people, the legislative assembly shall make provision for the establishment and maintenance of a system of public schools which shall be open to all children of the state of North Dakota and free from sectarian control. This legislative requirement shall be irrevocable without the consent of the United States and the people of North Dakota.” This means that one of the duties of our public school system is to promote patriotism and civic duty.

House Bill 1143 calls for each student to complete at least one patriotism project as part of their experience in elementary school, starting with the 2022-

2023 school year. The topic of each project is the student's choice. The purpose of these projects is to promote civic duty and, through exploration and inquiry, for students to understand the rights and responsibilities of living in a democratic society. These rights and responsibilities include the right to vote, the responsibility to be an informed citizen, and the responsibility to contribute to the betterment of the community. The bill calls for the department to write guidance for the schools regarding standards and implementation of the patriotism project.

In recent years STEM skills (relating to science, technology, engineering, and math) have been prioritized in our educational system. According to a November 2020 article in the Hechinger Report Covering Innovation and Inequality in Education, our schools spend \$54 per student on STEM education, but only 5 cents per student on civics education. While I will not argue that STEM skills are not important (because they are), it is imperative that we fund civics education ( which is part of our state constitution) at a higher percentage than one one-thousandth of something that is not listed in our state constitution.

Taking an interest in civic duty at a young age will lead to a greater chance that those students will be informed and involved in their communities when they get older. Having a society of informed and involved citizens will lead to a higher voter turnout, which in turn will lead to policies and a society that is most reflective of the view of its citizens. The purpose of HB 1143 is to encourage students to get involved

in their communities, be informed of the issues, exercise the right to vote, have their voices heard, and participate in the democratic process.

Chairman Schaible and Members of the Committee that concludes my prepared testimony and I will stand for any questions that you may have.