

The Honorable Members of the Senate Education Sub Committee
North Dakota Senate
State Capitol
600 East Boulevard
Bismarck, ND 58505

Re: HB 1356

Dear Senators,

I am writing to urge your positive support of House Bill 1356, which would essentially allow very specifically defined, patriotic societies, such as Boy Scouts and the Girls Scouts, to speak to students during regular school hours at each public school during the first quarter of each academic school year to explain how students may participate or join. The school principal would still dictate the time, place and manner of the presentation. I believe that the successful passage of this bill is important for several reasons.

First, Scouting builds character and a commitment to community service. A landmark 2015 study conducted by Dr. Richard Lerner, founder of Tufts University's (Boston) Center for Applied Positive Youth Development, to analyze the effects of Scouting on 2500 young men in the Philadelphia area found that when compared to a control group of non-scouts, over time, the young men involved in Scouting made significant gains in character traits— cheerfulness, kindness, hopefulness, future expectations, trustworthiness, helpfulness, and obedience. The study also found that the Scouts were more likely than non-scouts to embrace *positive social Values*. For example, when the scout control group was asked "What's most important you?", they were more likely to respond with answers such as "helping others", or "doing the right thing". In contrast, the non-scout control group was more likely to respond with "being smart", "being the best", or "playing sports". Obviously, there is nothing wrong with those answers, but it does suggest that Scouts are more likely than non-scouts to be concerned about others and their community. I reference the Tufts Camp Study because it provides academic support for what we always knew, anecdotally - Scouting builds character and civic responsibility.

Second, Scouting builds better Schools and better families. It is easy to see how individual students and families would benefit from improving in character attributes such as cheerfulness, kindness, hopefulness, future expectations, trustworthiness, helpfulness, and obedience. However, I would suggest that schools as well. Regarding Schools, growth in these specific character traits would likely result in less truancy, less disciplinary violations, and better than average academic performance. It would also result in increased participation in extra-curricular activities such as clubs, band, student government, and sports. I have the pleasure of reading every Eagle Scout Application every year. Without exception, in addition to Scouting, these young men and now young women lead in their school clubs, sports teams, band, work and church programs as well. They tend to be honor roll students and have robust plans for their future that include College, the Military, and / or public service. I am confident that the 5000+ young men and young women that make up the Northern Lights Council membership, collectively, make their schools better, not worse.

Finally, the community and the State benefit from Scouting as well. For example, in 2020, despite a pandemic, Scouts in the Northern Lights council delivered 33,849 hours of community service including, but not limited to, collecting, and distributing 1,000's of pounds of food to Community Food banks. In addition, over 97 Eagle Scout Service projects were conducted with a minimum of 8,000 hours of community service alone. This does not include the 1,000's of undocumented service hours freely given by our volunteer leaders and parents. The Independent Sector values volunteer time at \$27.20 per hour. At this rate, our 41,849 hours of community service is valued at \$1,138,292. If this "contribution" were removed from our various communities, we would all feel the loss.

I understand that there has been some concern from schools about this bill will either a) create legal exposure from other organizations; or, b) the school district is losing local control. Regarding legal exposure. HB 1356 was specifically written to protect school districts. Some Superintendents have told us that they would like to allow a presentation, but they could not because of a fear of Lawsuits from other groups. HB 1356 is very narrowly focused and derives from a federal statute that defines specific organizations, which in North Dakota would be the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. The same legislation has been in effect in South Dakota for over two years and it has worked well without incident. Regarding "Local Control". HB 1356 specifies that local principals would control the "Time, Date, and Manner" in which the presentations take place. All that control is local.

Scouting builds Character and life skills including all 40 of the Developmental Assets identified by the Search Institute. The Scout Law teaches students to be Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, and Brave to name a few. These are all traits that make better students and are objectives in most of our State's school mission statements. Having positive role models both in school and after school creates an atmosphere for success. Scouting is run by local volunteers, primarily parents from all of our School Districts. And, every scouting unit – pack, troop, crew, post- is chartered to a community organization -- Kiwanis, Rotary, AM Vets, churches – in our local communities. Everything about Scouting is local. It is delivered by the community, for the community. But, we need the cooperation of the schools.

For Scouting to grow, we need to be able to make a brief presentation in schools each year. We are completely mindful of the burden that schools shoulder educating young people. We do not want to detract from that mission in any way. In fact, we support it. And, as I have showed, Scouting involvement reinforces the lessons taught in school.

Unfortunately, most of the largest school districts in the state have a standing policy that bars all "non-school" groups from making any kind of presentation. In addition, some schools have even barred distributing recruitment fliers for what they call "non-school" activities. They rely on electronic newsletters or announcements that "fliers are available in the office if anyone wants them." This simply does not work.

The Northern Lights Council's Year end membership has dropped significantly over the past 5 years as schools have systematically barred presentations through policy. For example, our 2015 membership was 9,572. By 2019 it had dropped (-1,856) or 19% to 7,716. The primary factor between 2015 and 2019 was a lack of School Access. To illustrate, our average fall recruitment in 2015 was 1200+ new members. In 2019 it was just under 800. I am not including 2020

numbers because we did not attempt a major recruitment drive due to Covid-19. Regardless, it should be easy to see that lack of school access is hurting Scouting.

As I stated earlier, we are not trying to be a burden on schools. However, we believe that there is a viable “middle ground”. We do not believe that a 5-minute presentation at the beginning of the school year would place an undue burden on instructional time. Especially, when the school Principal would rightly control both the “Time” and “Manner” in which the presentations would be conducted. In fact, we are not necessarily asking to be in classrooms as our presentations could be made during previously scheduled non instructional times. Examples include presentations in cafeterias during lunch or on the tail end of an existing school assembly. We are simply asking for an opportunity to present. I truly hope that you agree.

I am an Eagle Scout and the Father of an Eagle Scout. I know first-hand the added value that Scouting brings to the young women and young men who join either the Boy Scouts of America or Girl Scouts USA. My life was changed because of Scouting as was my son's. I assure you that I read that same sentiment in almost every Eagle Application that I sign. However, I and most of the scouts that I know of, may never have heard about the program without a short presentation that was done during school at the end of an assembly, cafeteria, or 5 minutes in a classroom.

I hope that you will look favorably on HB 1356. I believe that the future of Scouting depends on it. Please feel free to follow up with any questions. My email is richard.mccartney@scouting.org. My cell phone is 701.552.1822.

Sincerely,

Richard E. McCartney
Scout Executive