

This letter is in support of bill SB 2304 relating to requiring all elementary and secondary public and nonpublic schools in the state to include curriculum on Native American history.

My name is Lisa Casarez and I am an enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation. I am currently a graduate student at the University of Arizona, attending virtually and residing in Bismarck, North Dakota. Previously I have been a Hidatsa language and tribal government and history instructor for 3 years at Mandaree School on the Fort Berthold Reservation.

I hope my testimony helps persuade the committee to vote yes on this bill, which I think is important for many reasons.

There are rampant negative stereotypes about Indigenous people that stems from miseducation of our history as indigenous people and as North Dakotans. It can be an obstacle that contributes to toxic and stereotypical narratives of Indigenous peoples. Part of saying yes to this effort would be supporting healing relationships between indigenous people and the governing powers of the state of North Dakota. It would make it easier for others to propel efforts to build bridges of fellowship, within education and in our society. It starts with teaching the truth about colonization, and how Indigenous people view themselves in the world now and simply be able to be heard by having strong allyship with our non-Native peers, teachers, colleagues and even our own non-Native family members.

For an Indigenous person, it is hard to fight these misunderstandings on an everyday basis, with assumptions made at an institutional level and interpersonal level and that seems to be informed by widespread misinformation about Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous students should be able to be represented in the curriculum they are learning from, whether on the reservation or off, as tribal history resides on every inch of North Dakota soil. Non-Native students should also learn about Indigenous history and perspective to be able to understand the gravity and depth of how space was made for everyone who now calls North Dakota home.

Creating the infrastructure, starting with voting yes today, would only bolster positive feelings, among myself and many in our State who work in the areas of education and every other area where we share space and collaborate, as well as those who work with tribal peoples to create, sustain and help bolster the many partnerships between tribal governments and communities in North Dakota.

I would like thank you for your time today and encourage you to vote yes on SB2304.

Maacagiraac (Thank you),

Lisa Casarez