

February 4, 2025

Senate Education Committee Members
South Dakota State Capitol
500 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501

RE: Oppose HB 1002

Dear Education Committee Members:

I am providing written testimony before this committee to ask that you oppose HB 1002 and to repeal the requirement to force certified educators to take a course in South Dakota Indian Studies. As a graduate level student currently working on my Masters of Arts in Elementary Education and as a former substitute teacher within the Bennett County School District, I find this requirement a complete waste of time and a fleecing of a graduate student's education funds. The state should not be in the business of enforcing cultural awareness and sensitivity training on its future teachers. This requirement is an expansion of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) agenda that has plagued many of our universities across this country. Thankfully, the Trump Administration is quickly dismantling DEI offices across our Federal Government.

As a teacher candidate and a veteran who served my country for 21 years, I am currently using the Post 9/11 GI Bill to obtain my teaching degree. I have seen firsthand the woke agenda consistently woven through the education curriculum at my online university that I presently attend. During my online orientation at the university, I was forced to create an email signature block with my pronouns behind my name. This was the start of my awareness of how woke our universities have gotten and it continued throughout my classes when professors would promote the LGBTQIA+2S agenda in all of my classes and on my exams. I began to push back on this agenda by telling the university that the parents are the primary educators of their children and that the education at the local school is supplementary to what is not taught at home. The university began to threaten me by informing me that if I did not subscribe to the university's DEI agenda that was being promoted, then I would be required to attend special DEI, cultural sensitivity training if I didn't comply. Furthermore, the university retaliated by threatening me that I would NOT receive a letter of recommendation to perform my classroom clinical experience (student observations or student teaching) within a school district in South Dakota. This is the madness that I have had to put up with the last two years. It was only after I threatened the university with a law suit did they finally back down and disciplined the two professors who harassed me. To put it bluntly, the teachers colleges across the country are indoctrinating teacher candidates to indoctrinate our students.

As a 56-year old Caucasian man, I applied for multiple scholarships through my university. Because of my veteran status and because of my ethnic background, I was passed over for any university scholarship. I have always been able to obtain a scholarship in my past universities that I attended, but the woke mob does not see me fit for receiving a scholarship to obtain a masters in elementary education, especially in a field that is predominately female. I currently have three degrees: a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Civil Engineering, and a Masters of Arts in Sacred Theology. Never in my wildest dreams while attending a post-secondary institution would I encounter drama of this nature at a university, specifically an online university.

It is time that South Dakota drops this Indian studies requirement to credential our teacher candidates. Our teacher candidates ought to be focused on the basics: reading, writing, and arithmetic. These are

critical skill sets that must be the priority of our state. As a substitute teacher for five years within my local school district, I saw several teachers teaching mathematics incorrectly, but because I was the substitute teacher, I couldn't say anything. As a student candidate, I can attest that the writing skills of some of our young professional teachers and university professors are atrocious. I am wondering how did they get a degree and yet they cannot even type a complete and coherent sentence.

As a future teacher, I would hope that the state would put its energy on hiring quality teachers that are focused on basic skills that put our students' interest first so that they are prepared for real world applications. How does a course in Indian Studies prepare our students for the real world? Moreover, how does it prepare our teachers to address the array of issues that we face in our Native American communities across South Dakota? As a substitute teacher, I found that the biggest issue in our Native communities is that almost 80 to 85% of the children live in a single parent home or are being raised by a care provider such as a grandparent or other extended family member. These children are more interested in learning in a safe environment than worrying about whether the teacher has had cultural awareness and sensitivity training.

Moreover, it would be more appropriate that the legislature focus on getting more teachers for our state since it is my understanding that we have a significant teacher's shortage. You want to quickly remedy this problem? Then I recommend you axe this requirement for teacher candidates like me who have to jump through multiple hoops to obtain the necessary credentials to obtain a teacher certification in this state. It is time that the state streamlines the process for certification of its teacher candidates rather than continuing to put up road blocks, requiring additional time and out-of-pocket expenses for our teacher candidates. My current school district continues to import teachers from the Philippines under the work visa permit program. This costs school districts time and money to sponsor these teachers. It's time that the state get back to what is important when preparing our students for the 21st century. If the state wants to continue to force this requirement upon its teacher candidates then perhaps push this requirement to the local level and let it be a local school board decision and not a state mandate. Every school district in this state is unique. Local school districts can determine the types of cultural awareness and sensitivity trainings that are needed within their own school districts. If a local school district determines that it is essential to have cultural awareness and sensitivity training for local Indian populations, then it can bring in or send its teachers to a cultural awareness and sensitivity training. Local school boards can make this decision without it being a requirement from our legislature and state Board of Education.

Do me a favor Education Committee Members. Oppose this bill and repeal the requirement to force certified educators to take a course in South Dakota Indian Studies so that our teachers can focus on what is truly at stake in our state: increasing our students' test scores in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics and promoting a safe classroom environment for our children.

Sincerely,

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