



2025

SESSION REPORT



Together we can speak with a strong voice-
the *Family Voice*



This year Brian Gosch joined our lobbying team. He focused primarily on the goal of expanding education options for families in South Dakota. His wealth of knowledge and impressive political resume have been a great asset to the pro-family cause!

Progress for the Pro-Family Cause

2025 was another whirlwind of a year, and because of your help the pro-family cause made significant progress. You stepped up in a big way, and joined us in the stand for conservative principles and biblical values.

This session included lots of “new”:

New Legislators – The 2025 Legislative Session included 10 Senators and 10 Representatives who were entering their first term of office. Every election cycle sees turnover, but this year the Capitol had more new faces than normal.

New Ideas – South Dakota was on the leading edge of a few new ideas, such as the age verification bill for app stores (more on this later in the report). New ideas often take multiple attempts before they are passed into law, and we will continue pressing forward!

New Challenges – Every year presents its own unique challenges, and this year was no different. With new friends at the Capitol and new bill ideas, we worked hard to build new coalitions and create momentum for the pro-family cause.

A few highlights – this year South Dakota:

- Took steps to protect kids from obscene materials
 - Ensured that parents have access to their children’s medical records
 - Implemented privacy protections for restrooms and overnight accommodations
 - Placed safeguards on the South Dakota Constitution
- And more...

Continue reading for the details of the bills, and our other efforts this year!

-Norman Woods, Director



HB1053 – An act to require that explicit websites implement age-verification systems

Representative Bethany Soye introduced legislation again this year to protect kids from explicit websites. The bill requires these websites to implement an age verification system, which serves as a safeguard to reduce children's access to harmful content. This year South Dakota became the 20th state to pass an age verification bill.

This was a good piece of legislation that passed

Washington Examiner

South Dakota becomes 20th state to pass pornography age-verification law

By Kaitlin Deese



February 27, 2023 1:01 pm

"After a multi-year battle, the bill has passed with overwhelming support — this sends a powerful message to the industry: stay away from our kids,"

**Norman Woods,
Director of SD Family Voice**

The requirements in the bill are not new a new concept. Other industries, such as sports betting companies, are required to verify a person's age online before allowing participation. The bill simply requires websites that produce explicit content to implement a similar system. We are excited that South Dakota has joined the growing list of states taking action to protect kids from online pornography.

The bill passed the House 61-5 and the Senate 34-0

SB180 – An act to require age verification and parental approval for mobile application downloads

This was a good piece of legislation that did not pass

Did you know that each time a person downloads an app onto their phone or tablet they are essentially signing a legal contract? The “terms of service” in each app downloaded serves as a legal contract. This raises an important question – “Should children be asked to sign these legal agreements?” And possibly more important – “Should parents have the final say on which applications are downloaded onto their child’s phone?”

Senator Sue Peterson brought this bill to answer both questions, and ensure that parental approval is gained before an application is downloaded.

The bill did not pass committee, failing on a vote of 1-5

HB1239 – An act to ensure that libraries and educational institutions comply with laws that protect minors from explicit content

This was a good piece of legislation that was re-written by an unfriendly “hoghouse” amendment

In South Dakota, we have laws ensuring that adults do not give obscene materials to children. It’s against the law for anyone to intentionally give this material to a child - unless you work at a school or a library. Representative Bethany Soye brought this bill to remove the bizarre exemption, and ensure that our taxpayer-funded institutions are held to the same standard as everyone else when it comes to protecting kids.

The bill passed the House 38-32 before being gutted and re-written in the Senate by an unfriendly hoghouse amendment.

The final version of the bill, which did not achieve the goal of the prime sponsor, was passed by the Senate 32-2 and the House 36-34

“Hoghouse”



“Hoghouse” is a legislative nickname for an amendment that totally re-writes the bill. A hoghouse amendment deletes all of the language, and replaces it with something new.



SB113 – An act to protect parental rights

This was a good piece of legislation

that did not pass

Senator Tamara Grove brought this bill to add additional protections to parental rights. We know that parents have a fundamental right to direct the upbringing of their children, and SB113 would have placed additional safeguards on this right. The bill required that “strict scrutiny” be applied to future government actions that infringe on a parent’s right to raise their child as they see fit.

The bill passed the Senate 30-4 but failed in the House 31-39 when the Conference Committee report was not adopted

Strict Scrutiny:



The standard of strict scrutiny is applied to a government action when that action infringes on a citizen’s fundamental right. For example, if the government takes an action that violates your freedom of speech, that action is subject to strict scrutiny.

When strict scrutiny is applied, the government must prove two things before moving forward. The state must show that it:

1. Has a “compelling state interest” to take action (like public safety)
2. Has used the “least restrictive means,” or least burdensome option

What does this look like in real life? Here’s an example:

For the Amish, using modern technology violates their religious beliefs. As a result, their buggies do not have headlights or tail lights. This was a problem because other cars could not see them. The government had a “compelling state interest” (safety of everyone on the road) to require the buggies to be lit. However, requiring the buggies to have an electronic lighting system was not the “least restrictive means” to accomplish this goal. The compromise? Reflective tape. Requiring the buggies to be outfitted with reflective tape accomplished the government’s interest in safety, while only placing a minor burden on the religious practice of the Amish drivers.

HB1061 – An act to ensure parental access to children’s medical records

This was a good piece of legislation that was passed

Representative John Hughes uncovered a troubling reality in South Dakota: hospital systems were automatically locking parents out of their children’s online medical records on the child’s 12th birthday. In addition, some hospital staff were also refusing to give paper copies of

the records to the parents. In both of these situations (online portal and in-person visits) the child was required to sign a waiver giving access to their parents. This bill fixed the problem, and ensures parents have access to their children’s medical records.

The bill passed the House 63-4 and the Senate 34-0



HB1248 – An act to allow for a minor to consent to certain prenatal & post-natal treatments without parental consent

This was a harmful bill that was withdrawn by the sponsor

Although good prenatal care is often key for the health of mother and baby, this bill would have implemented a dangerous legal precedent into South Dakota law. Parental involvement in the care of minors is a foundational principle, and HB1248 would have undermined it.

The bill would have allowed a doctor to give treatment to a minor without parental consent, as long as an effort was made to contact the parent.

The measure was withdrawn by the sponsor, presumably due to lack of support



SB156 – An act to prohibit marriage for 16 or 17 years olds

This was a harmful bill

that was defeated

Right now in South Dakota, someone who is 16 or 17 is able to get married if they have parental approval. Although marriage at this age is not often advisable, making it illegal would be a harmful decision.

Here's why:

- It would make the assumption that getting married young is inherently problematic, rather than recognizing that many couples get married young and build successful marriages
- It could increase abortive tendencies, as lack of partner support/commitment is a common motivator for abortion
- It would override the parents, and say "the state knows best"
- It left the age of consent at 16, which means that South Dakota law would officially be saying "You can hook up, but you can't get married"
- It would do nothing to catch abusers who, as proponents of the bill claimed, are currently abusing our marriage laws

Whenever we seek to define something, like marriage or anything else, we must ask, "What is it for?" And when making

laws, "Why does the state have an interest in this question in the first place?"

What is marriage for?

At its core, the institution of marriage civilizes men, protects women, and provides the safest and most successful environment for the raising of children. This is what marriage does for society, and why our laws and culture hold the institution in high esteem.

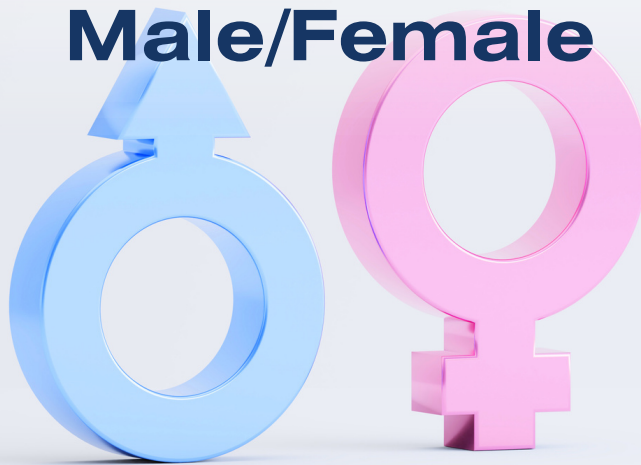
Why does the state have an interest?

The state has an interest in marriage because it has an interest in children. Many conservative thinkers are asking questions about "getting the state out of it," and removing all marriage laws because "It's between me and God, not me and the state." This mentality misses the point: the state is recognizing a union, and affirming its value – not creating or defining the union. State recognition of marriage serves children, and the state has a duty to protect the vulnerable.

Proponents of the bill assumed that marriage is just a piece of paper, and claimed that the marriages would be inherently harmful. The proponents failed to recognize that marriage is a stabilizing factor, a commitment that grows both parties, and a union that benefits the children born from it.

The bill failed in the Senate on a vote of 16-19

Male/Female



HB1259 – An act to ensure bodily privacy in restrooms and overnight accommodations

This was a good piece of legislation that was passed

Representative Brandei Schaeffbauer reintroduced a bill that South Dakota has attempted multiple times – protecting privacy in restrooms. In South Dakota, there are multiple examples of schools failing to recognize the privacy of students, and are allowing students of the opposite sex to use the facilities of the other. HB1259 ensures that bodily privacy is protected in public schools, during school sponsored overnights, and in other government buildings.

The bill passed the House 49-21, and the Senate 27-6

HB1260 – An act to ensure that state documents reflect biological sex

This was a good piece of legislation that did not pass

Representative Brandei Schaeffbauer brought HB1260 to require that state documents such as birth certificates reflect biological sex. We know that biology matters, and it's important that our state documents reflect bodily realities.

The bill failed in the House on a vote of 35-35

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The dignity of the human person is rooted in our DNA.

– Representative Schaeffbauer

Gambling Expansion



Gambling Expansion

The gaming industry is making a profit in South Dakota - but what is the true cost?

South Dakota is ranked:

- Highest number of casinos per capita (tied with Nevada and Oklahoma)
- Highest number of gaming machines per capita (tied with Nevada, Montana, and Oklahoma)
- Second “most addicted” state (WalletHub, 2025 Report)

Gaming addiction has a severe impact on South Dakota, and we know that on average:

- Addicts have a 15x higher rate of suicide
- Addicts have a 65% divorce rate
- Only 20% can maintain their job and their addiction
- An estimated 68 of the 210 reported embezzlements (2023) were tied to a gambling addiction

SB205 – An act to increase the number of video lottery machines

Nearly every year we see attempts from the gaming industry to expand their operations through new games, more machines, higher bets, and more. This year was no exception. This bill would have increased the number of video lottery machines that are allowed in an establishment from 10 to 15.

This was a harmful bill

that was defeated

The bill did not pass the Senate Chamber, failing on a vote of 16-19.

SB206 – An act to increase the bet limit and winning potential for video lottery

This was a harmful bill

that was defeated

This bill sought to increase the bet limit and winning potential on video lottery machines, raising the bet limit from \$2 to \$4 and the winning potential from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

The bill did not pass committee, failing on a vote of 3-5

SJR507 – An act to place on the 2026 ballot the question of mobile sports betting

This was a harmful measure

that was withdrawn by the sponsor

SJR507 would have placed the question of mobile sports betting on the 2026 ballot. Currently, sports betting is limited to the casinos in Deadwood, and this would have expanded access to mobile devices across the state.

The measure was withdrawn by the sponsor, presumably due to lack of support

HB1203 – An act to implement betting on horse races and establish a new tax

This was a harmful bill

that was withdrawn by the sponsor

HB1203 sought to add horse racing to the list of games available to a gambler in Deadwood. The measure would have also implemented a new tax, applied to the new form of betting.

The bill was withdrawn by the sponsor, presumably due to lack of support or technical problems





Education

HB1020 – An act to implement school choice for families in South Dakota

This was a good piece of legislation that did not pass

South Dakota has an education crisis on our hands. The 2024 proficiency rates for students in public school were:

English language arts = 51%

Mathematics = 44%

Science = 43%

Something needs to change.

During her 2024 budget address, then-Governor Kristi Noem announced her support for the concept of “school choice” and requested \$4 million in the budget to begin implementing the program. Her budget request and subsequent efforts with coalition members became House Bill 1020 – sponsored by Representative Scott Odenbach.

The premise behind school choice is simple: when parents are empowered to choose the best education pathway for their kids, their kids succeed. In addition, when the free-market principle of competition is introduced into education, every student benefits – a rising tide lifts all boats.

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The education status quo is simply not good enough. Improving it requires something new. Decades of new educational programs and increased spending have not done the trick, unless the trick is increasing taxes and ballooning federal budgets. On behalf of children and parents who currently feel left without viable options, I absolutely support ESAs.

–Dr. Joseph Graves,
Secretary of Education

This bill would have implemented something similar to a “pilot program” for school choice in our state. The \$4 million budget request would have given approximately 1,000 scholarships to South Dakota students to attend a school of their choice.

Currently, public schools receive approximately \$11,000 per student (\$7,000 from the state, \$4,000 from local taxes). This estimated \$11,000 is significantly higher than the \$3,000 scholarship offered by the school choice program. The net result? Improving education for South Dakota students while saving taxpayer dollars.

Giving parents the power to choose where their children go to school gives South Dakota an “insurance policy” against the type of far-left ideologies that we see in blue cities.

More than just an insurance policy against the bad, school choice is a motivator for good. The primary benefit of school choice is that every child benefits. When healthy competition is introduced and parents have real options, improvement will result. This was clearly seen in Oklahoma as record numbers of schools came off of the “failing list” due to improvements made after the implementation of school choice. We look forward to the passage of future school choice legislation, and remain committed to empowering families with real options.

The bill did not pass committee, failing on a vote of 6-9

SB51 – An act to require the display of the 10 Commandments in public school classrooms, and the inclusion of the 10 Commandments and other documents into the curriculum.

This was a good piece of legislation that did not pass

Senator Carley introduced SB51 to require the display of the 10 Commandments in every public school classroom, and also require that the 10 Commandments, U.S. Constitution, State Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and other key documents be included in the curriculum taught to students.

The bill passed the Senate 18-17 but did not pass the House, failing on a vote of 31-37



HB1044 – A bill to implement “baby boxes”

This was a good piece of legislation that was passed

Last year in Sioux Falls, a deceased infant was tragically found in a recycling center dumpster. These tragedies can be avoided by South Dakota’s “Baby Moses Law” – a law that allows a desperate mother to surrender her infant if she cannot raise it.

The problem: the mother in a desperate situation may avoid a face-to-face interaction.

This bill, brought by Representative Bethany Soye, adds another option for a “baby moses” infant surrender: a safe, climate-controlled baby-box installed in a fire station or another similar facility. These boxes offer an anonymous option for mothers in a desperate situation to leave their child in better hands.

The bill passed the House 68-0 and the Senate 34-0

Medical Use of Marijuana



HB1055 – An act to ensure a bona fide relationship with a doctor before a marijuana card is given

This was a good piece of legislation that did not pass

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We see across the nation that ‘medical’ marijuana is turned intentionally into recreational marijuana.

I do not want ‘medical’ marijuana to be recreational marijuana.

--Representative Novstrup

Representative Al Novstrup brought this bill in an attempt to ensure that a person has a bona fide relationship with a doctor before they receive a marijuana card. This was an effort to stop the “pop-up clinics” we are seeing in our state where a team comes to town for a short period, meets with people for a few minutes, and gives them a marijuana card.

After receiving their card, the person goes to a pot shop where a marijuana salesman (called a “bud tender”) gives them a suggestion for how much marijuana they should smoke or eat. This is a far cry from the “medicinal” use that voters had in mind.

HB1055 would have taken a small step towards ensuring that patients have an actual relationship with a doctor before using marijuana, but this bill was defeated.

The bill did not pass committee, failing on a 5-8 vote



Elections

HB1169 – An act to require that signatures be gathered from each county when petitioning to change the State Constitution

This was a good piece of legislation that was vetoed by the Governor

Efforts to change the state constitution in South Dakota are becoming far too common. We see out-of-state-interests paying petition gatherers to collect signatures, who primarily spend their time in Rapid City and Sioux Falls.

Should these two population centers decide what is on the ballot? Representative Rebecca Reimer led the charge to say “No” by bringing this bill, requiring signatures be gathered from each Senate district in the state (35 total). This would have ensured broad statewide support of an issue rather than only the most populated areas of our state deciding what constitutional amendments appear on the ballot.

The bill passed the House 60-9 and the Senate 19-15, but was vetoed by Governor Rhoden.

HJR5003 – A resolution to place on the 2026 ballot an amendment to the constitution requiring future amendments to reach a 60% vote for approval

This was a good measure that was passed

This resolution, brought by Representative John Hughes, will place an important question on the 2026 ballot: ‘Should we raise the threshold for amending our constitution?’

Currently, the state constitution can be amended by a vote of 50% + 1 vote. If this measure passes during the 2026 election, then future amendments to the state constitution will need to reach a higher threshold: 60% instead of 50%.

The measure passed the House 61-5 and the Senate 29-4 and will appear on the 2026 general election ballot

2025 Legislative Interns

This year we had three students as legislative interns, and they jumped in with both feet. Our interns join us for morning committees, attend brainstorming meetings with allies, help with research projects, and sometimes testify in committee!



Brianna Sargent

Brianna lives in Pierre, and was able to join us for a day to learn more about the legislative process. She was also a part of the legislative page program, a 2-week commitment of service to the legislators. It was encouraging to spend the day with her and brainstorm about ways to communicate biblical truth to the younger generations.



Tommy Houghton

Tommy is a multi-year TeenPact graduate, who joined us for a week to take a deeper dive into the legislative process.

When asked “After being up here for a week, what surprised you?” Tommy said:

“I thought that everyone would agree that taking obscene materials out of libraries was a good idea, but there was a lot of opposition.”



Dawson Schroeder

Dawson joined us for a week at the Capitol, taking time off from his college studies. He is an officer with the SDSU College Republicans, and is studying political science. His passion for conservative principles showed through during his week in Pierre, and he fully applied himself to the process. He even testified in a legislative committee against a bill!



“My favorite surprise coming up here was how Representatives would pray before things, be open about their faith, and reference Bible verses in their testimony.”

-Dawson Schroeder



Day at the Capitol

Bringing our friends to the Capitol for the day is always a highlight for our team - it's a feeling of "reinforcements have arrived!"

It's always an adventure, and a day full of:

- Meeting new friends
- Exploring the Capitol
- Singing in the rotunda
- Having lunch with elected officials
- Watching committee hearings
- Attending floor sessions
- Hearing from pro-family leaders on how we can make an impact
- ...and more!

This year we had a large team of volunteers devote their time and energy to the event. We are extremely grateful to Grace Sargent and Amy Wagner for leading the event, as well as all the help from Kaye Sjaarda, Jen Beving, Don Haggar, Chris David, Glenda Mitchell, and Michael Boyle!



Mark your
calendars
for next
year, we are
booked for
January 27,
2026!