



Chairman Weisz and committee members:

My name is Faith Wahl, and I am the Vice President of Communication for the North Dakota Student Association (NDSA). I am here today to provide support for SB 2161, relating to the creation of a mental health provider registry and behavioral bed management system.

The North Dakota Student Association is a statewide organization that represents the voices of approximately 45,000 students enrolled in the eleven public institutions throughout the state of North Dakota. The NDSA meets monthly to discuss different issues and topics that are relevant to students and votes on resolutions to express the NDSA's stance on different matters.

As Vice President of Communication for the NDSA, I chair our Student Affairs Committee (SAC) every month. On January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the Student Affairs Committee met and discussed SB 2161. Students from across the state expressed how the unprecedented stressors and challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic had affected them. I listened to stories of stress, anxiety, depression, and much more. According to data from an Inside HigherEd article titled *Pandemic Hurts Student Mental Health*, 66% of college students reported financial stressors as a result of COVID-19<sup>[1]</sup>. Additionally, the article reported that depression among college students has increased approximately 9%, with 30.5% of students reporting their mental health has been severely impacted by the pandemic. The NDSA has advocated for increased access to mental health providers and resources for students in the past and believes that those resources are of paramount importance to ensure student health and academic success.

SB 2161 proposes the creation of an online database that would list all mental health providers in the state along with their specialty, location, and contact information. While all students enrolled in the North Dakota University System (NDUS) have access to free counseling through their respective institutions, the NDSA believes that the creation of a mental health provider registry will increase access to mental health providers and resources for students that choose to seek care outside of their university. Furthermore, the proposed mental health registry would allow students to have expanded options for the treatment and care of more specialized needs that universities may not be able to provide.

The NDSA supports SB 2161 and the creation of a mental health provider registry in order to increase access to mental health providers and services for students. As North Dakota navigates through the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to invest in students and their wellbeing.

I respectfully request a do pass on SB 2161 and am available to answer your questions. Thank you.

**Faith Wahl**

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[1] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/07/13/survey-finds-higher-prevalence-depression-among-students-and-difficulties-accessing>