

Mr. Chairman, Mr. and Ms. Vice Chairmen, and members of the committee, my name is Dr. Rebecca Meidinger from Lincoln. I'm in favor of this bill specifically Section 18 that amends Section 15.1-06-19 of the North Dakota Century Code.

I am a previous School Counselor and currently a Counselor Educator in North Dakota. Utilizing my knowledge on the history of school counseling, the training of our school counselors in North Dakota, and research surrounding the job descriptions of school counselors in North Dakota I hope to share with you some reasons why the specific duties of school counselors submitted in Section 18 of House Bill 1013 are appropriate and needed.

To understand our current needs related to the roles of school counselors, it is important to note our history and see where roles have not always been straight forward. School counseling began in the early 1900s to offer assistance to students on vocational selection within the high school setting (guidance counseling). In the 1940s and 1950s elementary school counselors were first introduced to create relationships with families and meet the needs of younger students. Additionally, the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) was formed in 1952 to create a national association related to the profession of school counseling. After ASCA was formed, there continued to be an attempt to create a professional identity within the school setting. It is noted that in the 1970s specifically, school administrators identified the duties/roles of the school counselor within their school based on their experiences. These duties/roles did not always match the training or professional identity of school counselors. This led to the creation of comprehensive school counseling programs and specifically the ASCA National Model which gives school counselors a framework for meeting the needs of all students through data-driven preventative services (individual, small-group, classroom, and whole school direct and indirect services). Currently, the ASCA National Model is in its four edition with the ASCA Mindsets

and Behaviors for Student Success for student standards. The goals of the ASCA National Model and Mindsets and Behaviors is to assist students' development in Academic, Career, and Social-Emotional Learning and prepare them for post-secondary life.

Currently our School Counselors in North Dakota typically hold a master's degree in counseling that includes 60 graduate credits of curriculum related to the development of them as school counselors. In this section, I will focus on the curriculum I teach to students as I do not want to speak for all counseling programs. Our students take several core counseling courses that include: Counseling Orientation, Counseling Theories, Counseling Techniques, Counseling Ethics, Social & Cultural Foundations of Counseling, Psychopathology, Group Counseling, Research & Program Evaluation in Counseling, Counseling Skills Labs I & II, Counseling Practicum, Assessment Techniques, Human Growth & Development, Career Counseling, Crisis Counseling, and Family Counseling. These core counseling courses are also taken by our clinical mental health counseling and addiction counseling students. In other words, our school counselors are trained mental health professionals with much of the same education as other counselors. The school counseling students receive additional education in courses titled Comprehensive School Counseling Programs, School Counseling Practices, Professional Issues in School Counseling, and School Counseling Internship to educate them on the specific needs of K12 students and working in K12 environments. This curriculum aligns with the educational standards set forth by DPI for a school counseling credential, ESPB for school counseling program curriculum requirements, and the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (national accreditation) educational standards. We are training our students to be mental health providers in the K12 setting within this curriculum.

In 2018-2019, I conducted a research study focused on the job descriptions of school counselors in North Dakota. I was interested to identify the role of school counselors according to the written expectations placed in a job description. Out of the 86 school districts that responded to the call for documents, I only received 39 job descriptions. Fifty-six school districts responded that they did not have a job description for school counselors. Over half of the school districts did not have a written job description for the school counselor position. This data suggests a possibility for role confusion on the part of the school counselor and school administrator(s). How can we expect professionals to know what to do if we do not have an agreed upon job description for a position? Also, how can we expect school administrators to evaluate the school counselors if there is no description or expectations for a position?

In my personal and professional opinion, the appropriate and inappropriate duties of school counselors outlined in section 18 align with the current professional identity and educational standards of school counselors. Additionally, these duties will allow school counselors to meet the needs of K12 students through preventative practices. I also wish to note that the requirement of elementary school counselors will allow school counselors to meet the needs of our K through sixth grade students that also deserve the support of a school counselor to meet their academic, career, and social-emotional learning needs. We cannot only be there to support students once they hit seventh grade (if a n elementary school counselor is not hired) or only be there for minutes of their lives (if the elementary school counselor has a higher ratio of students).

I thank you all for your time and your dedication to the K12 students of North Dakota.