

1 HB1035 – DJS – Relating to the Uniform Juvenile Court Act

2 Mandan Public Schools – Carly Retterath Testimony

3 Good morning Chairwomen Larson and members of the Judiciary committee. For the record, my  
4 name is Carly Retterath. I am the Alternative Education Director for Mandan Public Schools. I  
5 am here today to urge you to give HB 1035 a Do Pass recommendation.

6 Three years ago, representatives from DJS approached Mandan Public Schools about a pilot  
7 project they wanted to implement for at-risk youth. Their idea was a school within a school that  
8 would provide wrap around services for students to keep them in school and out of the court  
9 system. After a few months of planning, we implemented the “Next Step” program at both Mandan  
10 High School and Mandan Middle School and expanded the capacity of our alternative high school  
11 in the fall of 2019. With the joint funding support of DJS and Mandan Public Schools we hired  
12 family liaisons, teachers, paraprofessionals and worked with community partners to ensure we  
13 could provide students the services they needed to be successful.

14 In many ways’ schools are the ideal vehicle to provide evidenced-based community services to  
15 youth and their families. Students in the K-12 system come from a wide array of home lives,  
16 cultural backgrounds and family dynamics but school is the common ground for all of them.  
17 Collaboration between community partners and the schools can result in a more streamlined  
18 referral process, consistent services for students, better data collection on outcomes and a more  
19 efficient use of resources. For this to become a reality school districts will require funding, training,  
20 and technical support to create effective wrap around service model for students.

21 We have seen at both Mandan High School and Mandan Middle School that the wrap around  
22 supports that are embedded into the Next Step program benefit all students. Any student has the  
23 ability to access services offered through the program to help them navigate school and life. These  
24 services include clinical counseling supports, social skills groups, academic interventions, and a  
25 safe environment to go to when needed. In addition, the training resources supported through DJS  
26 have allowed the district to provide professional development to staff that has had positive impacts  
27 that have extended beyond the Next Step program.

28 Mandan School does have two School Resource Officers that work in all eight of our school  
29 buildings. Because of the relationships that we are able to build with students in the Next Step  
30 program and behavioral supports we provide, our SRO's involvement in the program has been  
31 minimal. While schools and their communities will continue to need options for significant  
32 delinquent youth, day treatment programs like Next Step have shown to be an effective  
33 intervention for low risk youth offenders. An example of this success is a middle school student  
34 who in the 2018-2019 school year was absent 62 times (23 unexcused) and had 56 tardies. After  
35 participating in the Next Step program, this school year he has missed 11 days (0 unexcused) and  
36 has had 4 tardies. Improved attendance like this is the most important step in getting a student on  
37 track in school and in life. In addition, in nine of the last eleven school years Mandan High School  
38 lost an average of 22.2 students from school between the start of school and semester break. These  
39 students dropped out of school for varying reasons. With the Next Step program and an expanded  
40 alternative high school, we have cut those numbers in half. In the last two years we have lost an  
41 average of 11.1 students in the same time period.

42 Setting up a school within a school and having the supports in place to build relationships with  
43 students to find out what they need to be successful is grounded in research and it is best practice.  
44 Investing dollars on the front end to allow us to meet student needs so they can stay in school and  
45 be successful will pay big dividends when students graduate high school and become productive  
46 citizens in our society.

47 I urge you to give HB 1035 a DO PASS recommendation. I would be happy to stand for any  
48 questions.