

Testimony in Opposition to SB2244

Chairman Heinert and members of the Committee.

My name is Leslie Bieber, and I am the Superintendent of Alexander Public School District. I am here to testify in strong opposition to SB2244.

Teachers and principals work tirelessly to engage parents in their child's education through multiple forms of communication. Teachers regularly reach out via email, phone calls, texts, through platforms that allow real time communication, and parent-teacher conferences to keep families informed and involved. All staff emails are readily available on the school website, and we have a phone app specifically designed to provide important updates and streamline communication with parents. Schools consistently make efforts to connect with families, ensuring they have access to the information and support they need to be active partners in their child's education.

As a mandated reporter, the required training which was set in law by this legislative body includes how to direct our concerns to social services as they are the experts in determining IF or WHO are abusing children. As public school employee, it is not to me to determine WHO is abusing the child but rather only if it is suspected.

SB2244 requires districts to write descriptions about every extracurricular club, field trip, etc. Parents already have the ability to inquire about and engage with their children's activities. If parents feel they are not receiving answers, we have policies to file a complaint against personnel, curriculum, bullies, just about anything. The curriculum review policies are required to have for our Cognia reviews which is our accreditation system. Failure to have the necessary policies in place results in deductions during the accreditation review, potentially affecting the district's accreditation standing.

It is important to note that if a parent feels their rights have been violated, they already have legal recourse. Parents can sue school districts if they believe their rights have been infringed upon. This mechanism ensures accountability without the need for additional legislation. As a superintendent, I go through an annual law meeting with NDSBA and receive emails from federal education agency on what has been heard at the Federal Supreme Court level.

Open records law, NDCC 44-0418, allows school districts to charge money based on the time it takes for a district to comply with the request. If a person believes that a district has broken this law, they can file a complaint with the Attorney General.

The provision in SB2244 allowing parents to excuse their children from activities or instruction based on moral or religious objections, leaves it wide open! It opens the argument that the reason Johnny did not complete an assignment is because it was against their moral beliefs. Similarly, the provision allowing parents to excuse their children from school attendance for religious reasons opens the door for abuse of it. Chronic absenteeism is already a national crisis, and SB2244 could exacerbate the issue. If we want higher test scores, choice-ready students, and greater engagement, students must be in school. Allowing vague or unchecked excuses for absences undermines these goals.

Parental rights are already protected by current policies, NDCC and federal laws. Opposing this bill does not mean that I oppose parental rights, in contrary I welcome parental engagement but SB2244 is not the right pathway to reach it. I ask for a no vote on SB2244.

Thank you for your time and consideration.