



Testimony in Support of HB 1223 – Dealing with Student Expulsion

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

NDCEL, representing your K12 school leaders is here today to express my support for House Bill 1223, dealing with student expulsion.

As school administrators, our foremost responsibility is to create a safe, supportive, and equitable learning environment for all students. Discipline policies must strike a balance between maintaining order and providing students with the necessary support to address underlying challenges that contribute to behavioral concerns. HB 1223 offers a measured approach to student discipline, emphasizing both accountability and compassion.

One of the critical aspects of this bill is the provision that allows school districts to consider the severity of infractions, the age of the student, and their disciplinary history when determining the duration of an expulsion. This ensures that disciplinary actions are not one-size-fits-all but instead tailored to the unique circumstances of each student. Additionally, the ability to review and potentially reduce the duration of expulsion upon satisfying reinstatement conditions provides students with a clear path toward redemption and reintegration into their educational community.

The bill also acknowledges the importance of addressing equity in discipline by ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds and circumstances are treated fairly and with consideration of their individual needs. The ability of the school board to differentiate between a student expelled early in the school year versus one expelled just weeks before the end of the term is critical in maintaining a fair and just disciplinary process. Schools must have the flexibility to provide support and interventions that align with the student's educational trajectory and future opportunities as well as their need for potential counseling or rehabilitation.

As administrators, we often see students who exhibit behaviors stemming from unmet social, emotional, or mental health needs. Suspension and expulsion, while sometimes necessary, should not be and is NOT the default response. Unless it is mandated by law as it is in the case of guns, it is our very last resort. HB 1223 provides an opportunity to ensure that during periods of suspension or expulsion, students have



access to the resources and support they need to address the root causes of their behavior. This includes mental health services, behavioral interventions, and academic support, which are critical to fostering long-term student success.

Furthermore, the bill's recognition of alternative education programs ensures that students who require a different educational setting are given the appropriate time and resources to succeed. Providing flexibility in the disciplinary timeline for these students allows schools to address their unique needs while maintaining high expectations for behavior and learning.

I appreciate the legislature's commitment to supporting both the safety of our schools and the well-being of our students. I urge you to support HB 1223, as it aligns with our shared goal of fostering a safe, inclusive, and compassionate learning environment for all North Dakota students.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.