

Testimony in Support of HB 1530

Sienna Bowen

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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice-Chairman, and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Sienna M. Bowen, and I firmly stand in support of House Bill 1530.

I currently attend Horace High School in the West Fargo school district. While I'm not representing the school or district in any capacity, I'm simply communicating the issues and disparity facing my peers. My school was built incredibly recently, so much so that it hasn't even been completely finished with construction yet. However, despite my school getting many new facilities built, we can still see a lack of progress within my peers with special education needs. There's not adequate enough resources or room for these students, and many times they are separated from the majority of the student body, and they lose their voices in our school. I can tell you for certain: never once have I had the opportunity to share a class with a peer in special education, never have I gotten to share an extracurricular with a peer in special education, and never have I seen the same for many other students.

I can say for certain: there's funding for the special education programs that could be used. My school district has been constantly able to expand athletic and fine arts programs, so tell me why can't we do the same for special education as well? What it truly comes down to is disparities within school culture and observance of others, and with adequate research and knowledge on these disparities, we can gain the ability to fight said disparities and bring true equality among all students.

Additionally, as you may be aware, many states including North Dakota have faced an impending teacher shortage. This INCLUDES paraprofessionals who work with my peers with special needs. And by passing this legislation, we will be able to accurately and effectively determine what is the driving factors of this shortage, and if we can identify the cause, we can address the core issue itself. By solving this shortage, we would increase the quality and quantity of special needs education throughout North Dakota and truly create an equal learning environment for all.

In conclusion, by passing this legislation, we would learn the ways that our special needs students and their teachers are struggling with learning and teaching. And by learning more, we are therefore able to address the problems that they face and help the education quality of our great state flourish. Senators, take it from a student currently in high school, we need a change in the status quo of education for special education. So, I urge you to join me in supporting this legislation. Thank you for your time.

Sienna M. Bowen