

House Bill 1416

Chairman Weisz and Members of the Human Services Committee, my Name is Shawn Huss, and I am the Director of Special Education for the WilMac Multidistrict Special Education Unit in the Williston area. I am providing written testimony for you today with a neutral position with amendments on HB 1416.

As a director I do support the concept of working collaboratively with the Department of Human Services (DHS) as we continue to serve students at the early childhood level. I recently reviewed a document regarding proposed action of HB1416 and is my understanding that the Department of Human Services will assume responsibility for the state level administration of programs and services. In my opinion, the concept appears backwards. The path for kids birth to 5 is to transition into Kindergarten. With this in mind, it makes more sense to have the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) oversee birth to five with the DHS supporting families. However, I may not fully understand the intent as the bill is unclear and appears to have many unanswered questions.

Many early childhood experts in this State have raised relevant questions. The common question has been why they were not involved in this decision-making process? Additionally, it is my understanding the governors-appointed early childhood council was not consulted on this idea either. The lack of including key individuals in this planning process continues to facilitate mistrust among the field. In the book "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team" written by Patrick Lencioni, a leading expert in organizational health and team leadership, states that the first dysfunction of a team is lack of trust. Without trust we will never achieve the results we all want for children. In my opinion, this is the overall issue with the presentation of this bill as many of us are not aware of the intent.

I appreciate the efforts of the Department of Public Instruction and Department of Human Service's attempts to develop a more collaborative relationship. If I could offer two amendments for the committee to consider with a final suggestion. First, Section 3 of the bill should be removed. Second, a special education director or coordinator should be included on the early childhood council. Finally, and most important, prior to passing this bill a study should be completed answering the many questions early childhood experts are asking. This is not about fear of change, this is about providing what is in the best interest of children and families.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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