



North Dakota School Counselor Association

April Foth, President
Liz Kappel, President-Elect
Becky Meidinger, Past President

Natalie Heid, Secretary
Jared Bollom, Treasurer

March 16, 2021

Mr. Chairman Holmberg and Committee Members:

I am testifying in support of Section 18 of HB1013.

As a School Counselor, and the President of the North Dakota School Counseling Association, I am testifying in strong support of this Section of this Bill, as it is written, on behalf of the School Counselors of North Dakota. The reasons for our support are as follows:

First, it is a privilege to be a School Counselor in a state that has in place a mandate for 7-12 School Counseling at a 1-300 counselor to student ratio (this is nearly in line with the American School Counselors Association's recommendation of 1-250 and much better than most states in our Nation). This mandate was a great step toward improving student outcomes for our North Dakota students, especially as it pertains to College and Career Development & Readiness. However, it is important to note that preventative work with students, whether academic, social or emotional in nature, happens more at the elementary level. When students have access to a Comprehensive School Counseling Program at a young age, they are provided with social-emotional learning and support that allows them valuable opportunities to develop essential life skills and mindsets that can help them succeed as they move onto middle and high school, college/career & beyond.

Elementary School Counselors are often able to catch concerning behaviors or mindsets early and intervene before they negatively impact a student's later success in school and life. This is why expanding the counselor mandate to the elementary level would be so beneficial to our North Dakota youth.

Second, educators enter the School Counseling profession because they desire to help students thrive academically, socially, emotionally and in their future careers. They complete 60+ credits of graduate study to prepare to meet the many needs of a diverse population of students, dealing with a multitude of challenges in their young lives. However, when they start their first job, they are often taxed with a number of duties which are not an appropriate or effective use of their time. This makes it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to implement a Comprehensive School Counseling Program in its fullest capacity, which includes data driven decision making to identify the greatest needs of the students we serve.

This is discouraging. It not only affects the impact that school counselors can have on our North Dakota youth but also our ability as a state to recruit and retain highly qualified School Counselors to the profession. With school counseling already being an area of shortage for education, if something isn't done soon to protect the time and role of our School Counselors, this shortage will only grow larger and we will have even less mental health support within our schools when we are striving to increase it.



North Dakota School Counselor Association

April Foth, President
Liz Kappel, President-Elect
Becky Meidinger, Past President

Natalie Heid, Secretary
Jared Bollom, Treasurer

Page 2

Third, the mental health needs of students have been such a focus in recent years. The concerns for student mental health only continue to grow which has led to discussions about, and even a push for, increasing mental health services within our schools. Because of this, it seems only logical to start by putting into place legislation that protects the role and time of School Counselors, who are the Mental Health Professionals already in the schools. Protecting the role of School Counselors provides them the added time to be able to actually do the job for which they were trained, and as a result, be better able to identify, and often times meet, the needs of students before additional outside mental health support is needed.

These are the reasons that School Counselors across North Dakota are in support of this Section of Bill HB1013. I thank you for your consideration of this testimony, because the mental health needs of our North Dakota students are so strong that this legislation must be enacted.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me using the contact information below.

Sincerely,
April Foth
NDSCA President
701-269-3168
aprilsfoth@gmail.com