

SB 2265

Senate Human Services

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Chair Lee and Senate Human Services Committee Members: My name is Katie Fitzsimmons and I serve as the Director of Student Affairs at the North Dakota University System. I am here today in strong support of SB 2265, as it would support our students who have experienced or currently are experiencing homelessness.

The North Dakota University System wants to see all students succeed. For our students that are experiencing homelessness, that success involves accessing health care, including behavioral health, as seamlessly as possible. In the 2018-2019 school year, North Dakota's schools served 285 unaccompanied homeless youth. In our state, these youth are more likely to attempt suicide, more likely to abuse prescription medication and methamphetamines, and less likely to see a dentist. They desperately need access to basic health services and behavioral health treatment. Especially during the pandemic, basic medical care is necessary for youth on their own.

Currently, North Dakota law allows youth under age 18 to access only a limited scope of health services: STD and substance abuse treatment, prenatal and pregnancy care, and emergency care. Unaccompanied homeless minors cannot access basic health care (including physicals and dental care), or behavioral health care, without parental consent. These restrictions put youth at risk for serious health consequences, and even death. SB 2265 would remove these barriers, in a narrowly focused way that will only impact the small but very vulnerable population of unaccompanied homeless youth in North Dakota.

Though the majority of the population that could be positively affected by this legislation if it were to pass are not NDUS students, we know that there are unaccompanied youth that aspire to attend college. It is tough to get to college when you are experiencing homelessness, but it is even more difficult if you are experiencing homelessness and suffering from an untreated behavioral or physical health condition. We hope this legislation could set more youth on a good health trajectory, which could lead to a healthy education trajectory as well.

The North Dakota University System respectfully requests a Do Pass on SB 2265 and I am available to answer your questions. Thank you.