



Grand Forks Public Schools will provide an environment of educational excellence that engages all learners to develop their maximum potential for community and global success.

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Hearing of the Senate Human Services Committee, January 26, 2021 Testimony of Jennifer Modeen, LMSW

I strongly support SB 2258, which would eliminate barriers to birth certificates by allowing people experiencing homelessness to get a birth certificate with only one form of ID (that can include a letter from a service provider) and allow unaccompanied homeless youth under 18 to get their own birth certificate. Homeless youth and parents often need basic vital documents like a birth certificate to access employment, education, health, housing, and other needed services. The current process to get a birth certificate leads to a catch-22: people need a birth certificate to get an ID, and an ID to get a birth certificate.

It is essential that our current leadership understand the unique and often seemingly insurmountable barriers our youth experiencing homelessness face. While youth are viewed as resilient and unaffected by their current situation this is not the case. We must work to eliminate these barriers that will empower and engage our youth.

SB 2258 also makes sure that youth who are no longer staying with their parents can access their birth certificates. Due to the complex nature of family systems it can take months to figure out a plan for accessing a birth certificate.

Currently, ND law allows vital records to be issued to individuals who are at least sixteen years old. SB 2258 would ensure this is not a barrier for youth who need a birth certificate to get a job or access education, housing, or other services. Better access to birth certificates will help homeless youth access basic services and benefits, keeping them safer and healthier, which will empower them to access education and employment that can end their homelessness.

I strongly support SB 2265, which would allow unaccompanied homeless youth 14 and older to consent for routine health care, including behavioral health care—but not abortion. 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. **We must do a better job of eliminating barriers. We hear a lot about reducing out of home placement due to cost and trauma. This is an opportunity to empower youth, access care and work to create citizens that are engaged and focused on their future.**

I ask you to vote in favor of SB 2258. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at jmodeen200@mygfschools.org
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