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January 25, 2023

Testimony of:

Geoff Simon, Lobbyist #144
in opposition to HB 1251 – Small School Superintendent mandate
House Education Committee

Chairman Heinert and Committee members:

On behalf of the city, county and school district members of the Western Dakota Energy Association (WDEA), we wish to express our strong opposition to HB 1251, which would unnecessarily force small North Dakota school districts into what would be an awkward and often untenable situation requiring that smaller districts share a superintendent.

Supporters of this legislation apparently view it as a way to promote efficiency and save money, but it would do neither, and would quite likely have the opposite effect.

It's important that committee members understand the operation of a typical small North Dakota school district. WDEA's former president Gary Wilz was the School Superintendent in Killdeer, which at the time had an enrollment of around 500 students. Gary was not only superintendent, he also drove a school bus, helped out in the school cafeteria and also coached athletics. A current WDEA board member, Nick Klemisch, the superintendent in Garrison, not only drives a school bus, he's a certified school bus driving instructor. We've known other small school superintendents who maintained classroom teaching responsibilities, served as counselors and even swept floors.

The point of these examples is simple. Forcing superintendents to spread their time among two or more other districts would mean someone would have to pick up those additional responsibilities while the superintendent was in another district. So instead of saving money, the district may be forced to hire another teacher, bus driver, coach or cafeteria worker. While well-intentioned, in the real world of small schools, HB 1251 will be rife with unintended consequences that do nothing to improve school operations.

We would urge the House Education Committee to appreciate the devoted efforts of small school superintendents to perform whatever function their district may require, and send HB 1251 to the floor with a strong Do NOT Pass recommendation.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on this important issue.

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