

Chairman Heinert and House Education Committee Members,

My name is Michael Buelna. I am a concerned parent, an advocate of homeschooling and a former Youth Counselor for at-risk children and adolescents. I would urge you to vote yes on SB 2167.

The first section of the bill details the waiting period before a family can begin to homeschool. Current state law requires a statement of intent to be filed 14 days before home education can begin. The language is antiquated, dating back to the year 1989, when the bill was enacted. Families at that time were made to wait as they had to order materials before homeschooling could start. Given the state, the time and age we live in, information is more readily available and homeschooling materials are easily accessible. This, as a whole, has made it more reasonable for parents to have the materials required to homeschool: a great example would be online learning which allows instant access after acquiring legal tender for access to curriculums.

My own personal experience has taught me that retaliation from both students and teachers can happen and has happened. My child was a target for such an attack. I had made the tough decision to pull him out after submitting the paperwork to the school just a day later. The pleas of my child to not send him back were heartbreaking. He let me know that he was getting bullied by staff and students alike. The teachers would snap their fingers at him to hurry up with the work; the students would tell him that he didn't fit in. He did not want to return. I reached out to the North Dakota Home School Association which was able to help talk to the superintendent of my district. After our advocate spoke to the superintendent, he made a call to me and explained that my child did not have to show up and that the absences would be excused. The school could not assure the safety of my child or avoid retaliation so I was allowed to keep him home.

The time I spent working as a counselor for at-risk kids was invaluable and thus my decision to support a change for the waiting period. The 14-day waiting period is too much. My fear was that my son would be physically or mentally assaulted but I did not want to be punished by truancy law. No parent should have to weigh those options.

The proposed change would have a 5 day waiting period. As a parent I could essentially pull my child out to homeschool without worrying that I would later have a truancy issue. I feel that this would lessen the stressor around making a decision and let me focus on what is right for my child and move forward.

These changes are simple, but also make sense. Please vote in favor of SB 2167.

Michael Buelna

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