

1 SB 2340 – Counselor Positions-Requirement

2 Mandan Public Schools – Carly Retterath Testimony

3 Good morning Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education committee. For the record,  
4 my name is Carly Retterath. I am the Alternative Education Director for Mandan Public Schools.  
5 I am here today to support giving SB 2340 a Do Pass recommendation with the suggestion of  
6 additional amendment.

7 I became the director of Alternative Education for Mandan Public Schools four years ago and I  
8 have seen first-hand the increase of significant mental and behavioral health needs of students.  
9 There is no doubt that increased counseling support in our schools is essential to address these  
10 needs and expanding the pool of individuals that can provide these services will be a tremendous  
11 step in the right direction.

12 Like many schools, Mandan has struggled to fill open school counseling positions, having had  
13 three unfilled positions this past year. This was not for a lack of effort on the part of the district;  
14 school personnel attended career fairs, reached out to universities, and continued to advertise these  
15 positions well into the school year starting, with no luck in filling them. Despite the inability to fill  
16 these positions, MPS recognized the importance of student behavioral and mental health needs and  
17 took steps to address these through school based clinical counseling and social work support.  
18 Mandan Public Schools has partnered with Together Counseling, who currently provides  
19 individual school based clinical counseling services to over fifty student’s kindergarten through  
20 twelfth grade. In addition, Together Counseling has helped to cover general school counseling  
21 services at the middle school who is shorthanded due to the tragic passing of one of their school  
22 counselors. The expended definition of counseling services currently in SB 2340 now allows us to  
23 count these services to meet our district quota which we previously could not.

24 As a district we made the choice to seek these additional counseling services for students because  
25 we knew it was what was best for our students, not because of a quota set in law. Quotas do not  
26 get services for students, professional educators thinking creatively and using their resources do.  
27 In addition, the Department of Public Instruction has no means to enforce this quota and it has

28 become another piece of red tape that both schools and the department have to navigate taking  
29 time and energy that could be better spent elsewhere.

30 North Dakota does not require quotas for teachers, principals, social workers, librarians, or any  
31 other professional. Why should school counselors be the exception? School counselors are great  
32 and the work they do is invaluable, but does it make sense that they are the only education  
33 professionals with a quota? The issue with a quota is that when a school has 310 students, the  
34 school now needs 1.03 counselors. DPI is required to administer the law as it is passed. How can  
35 a school find a 3% FTE licensed school counselor? A guideline would work much better in the  
36 real world than a quota. I would propose an amending SB 2340 from a 300/1 quota to a guideline,  
37 so schools are able to meet the requirement and intent of this bill to better serve the students in  
38 their care.

39 I urge you to give SB 2340 a DO PASS recommendation with an amendment to remove the quota.  
40 I would be happy to stand for any questions.