

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. My name is Dr. Katherine L. Nelson, and I am a resident of Grand Forks, ND. I am also a former School Counselor, now School Counselor Educator, and I have been deeply committed to Professional School Counseling for over 20 years. I am a Primary Investigator of a school-based mental health research team. One aim of this research group is studying the longitudinal impact and outcomes of more American School Counseling Association Aligned Comprehensive School Counseling programs on critical educational outcomes. I will speak more about this soon. I am also serving as the North Dakota School Counseling Association Post Secondary Vice President, and represented our legendary state on our national American School Counseling Association's Ethical Standards Review Committee that drafted, proposed, and passed our current national School Counseling Ethics. I am also a Licensed Psychologist in North Dakota and hold a Licensed Professional Counselor Credential in another state. Finally, I am also speaking to you as a mother, a single mother of two elementary school-age children, a fifth and first grader, enrolled in Grand Forks Public Schools.

I commend those who wrote this critical piece of legislation with the intent of filling our state's desperately needed school counseling positions throughout North Dakota. Thank you for doing so. Rural and underserved areas, as we may all know from professional and/or personal experiences, are in desperate need of counseling and mental health professionals. We in North Dakota, have for a long time, creatively worked to fill our needed School Counseling Positions. In our attempts to do so, while we have some of the hardest working, most committed and professionally skilled Professional School Counselors I have had the great privilege of knowing and working with, as a state, we also already have some of the lowest educational standards to become a School Counselor.

The national standard is that a School Counselor must have, at minimum, a Masters degree in School Counseling and have a school counselor credential issued by the state department of education. The training to be a school counselor is unique from other counseling specialty areas and other areas of mental health services, such as social workers, licensed professional counselors, and psychologists. Professional School Counselors are vital Educational Leaders within our school communities. Professional School Counselors provide comprehensive academic, career, and social emotional counseling and instruction to all students enrolled in our schools. The comprehensive and systemic nature of the training to become a Professional School Counselor, and to effectively do the critical work of comprehensive, preventative, developmentally, and culturally responsive school counseling programs is needed to serve the educational mission of our schools. To support our school communities, and state's our economic development. A central aspect of this work is the collaboration and consultation Professional School Counselors do day in and day out, which facilitates collaborative and positive systemic change. When the school counseling profession first began, "pupil guidance," professionals served only a small handful of students, and were not educational leaders. This is not what professional school counseling now is. Again, I commend those who proposed this bill as a

creative way to address our needs. And, this bill will revert the gains of professional school counseling development and is not aligned with national best practices and standards.

I want to share with you a few of the findings of my longitudinal school counseling outcome research team.

1. In looking at seven years worth of daily attendance in a rural reservation K - 12 grade school, with 99% of students tribally enrolled and all students receiving free breakfast and lunch services, we found a reduction in school absences.
2. In looking at five years worth of daily and weekly suspension data, we also found a reduction in out of school suspensions for Black elementary students.
3. In looking at six years worth of graduation rates in another rural reservation high school, we found a 16% increase in graduation rates with the implementation of an American School Counseling Association Aligned comprehensive professional school counseling program.

Professional School Counselors and programs serve all students in our schools. As Educational Leaders in school communities, a central aspect of Professional School Counselors' work is collaborating and consulting with other school and communities leaders to strategically address inequities within educational outcomes.

Our graduate training programs throughout our state are working to train, to supply and produce if you will, highly competent professional school counselors to meet our state's needs. Collectively, the graduate programs will be able to do this. Again, I commend those who put forth this bill to meet our needs. And, respectfully, it is short-sighted, and furthers the gap between national standards for professional school counselors and those who may fill such positions under this bill. This is not legendary. I ask that you put a term limit of one year on such hires. This will allow schools to more readily fill these positions immediately, while our graduate programs are further able to produce qualified candidates, based on our national standards. Professional School Counselors are educational leaders that are needed to meet our students' and school communities' social emotional, academic, and career development needs, while consulting and collaborating with school stakeholders to serve our school communities throughout our state.

Thank you, and respectfully,

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