

Testimony of SB 2340
The House Education Committee
of the North Dakota House of Representatives
Representative Heinert, Chairman
March 7th, 2023

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education committee, my name is Andrew Rohrich, and I am the Government Affairs Chair for the North Dakota Counseling Association and the North Dakota Mental Health Counseling Association. I am providing written testimony in opposition of Senate Bill 2340.

This legislation will not have the desired result that those proposing it think it will. If you ask yourself why there are no addiction counselors or mental health counselors providing testimony in favor of this legislation, it is because they do not want to work as school counselors. If you allow schools to replace school counselors with other mental health professionals, those schools are either going to ask the other professionals to provide a service that is outside of their scope of practice, or you are going to deprive every student of the service that school counselors provide.

I am both a licensed addiction counselor (LAC) and licensed associate professional counselor (LAPC) in the state of North Dakota, and I have very little knowledge of the services school counselors provide and no training in that field. Take a school district with 1200 students, they are currently required to have 4 school counselors. If you allow the school to replace 2 of those counselors with an LAC and an LPCC, you are going to double the workload of the 2 remaining school counselors. If you think that the LAC and LPCC will help pick up the

workload, you would be suggesting that they provide those services which are outside of their scope of practice. Ask yourself, how many students in that 1200 student district have a substance use disorder? Every one of those students can use the services of a school counselor, and it's likely that less than 50 need the services of the LAC (even less in elementary schools). How will tax paying residents feel, knowing that their children will no longer get school counseling services, such as career aptitude testing because their school district hired an addiction counselor who will be working with a small minority of the students? Many schools already partner with community agencies to get other counseling needs met. While there is nothing wrong with providing mental health and addiction services, it should not be in place of school counseling services. This bill would completely remove school counselors from many districts forever, and further strain those larger school districts. Imagine if Mandan hired 4 LAC's and had no school counselors, because that is what this legislation would allow.

The bill in its current form does nothing to ensure the students will continue to get the services that school counselors provide. And when we look at school districts with only 1 school counselor, if they lose that to an LAC, most of those students will get nothing out of that position.

There is only one common-sense answer and I urge you to give SB 2340 a do not pass recommendation.

Andrew Rohrich
Government Affairs Chair
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