

House Bill No. 1144
Senate Education Committee
Testimony Presented by Amy Kempfer
Position: In Favor
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Chairman Elkin and members of the Committee, my name is Amy Kempfer. I am a chiropractor from Fargo, ND. I have also served as an adjunct instructor at various two- and four-year institutions in North Dakota. I dedicate much of my extra time each year volunteering for causes that advocate for safer childhoods for the children of North Dakota.

I support this bill for many reasons. To start, I am a mandated reporter myself. I didn't learn much about being a mandated reporter throughout my eight years at a post-secondary institution or even through the hundreds of hours of continuing education I have participated in since being a mandated reporter. Some of this continuing education was specifically aimed at providers who interact with children. Any message in training seems to be the same thing each time; you are a mandated reporter and must report any suspected abuse or neglect to the appropriate agency in your state. I honestly figured I would just know it if I saw it. After spending the time that I have getting educated in the non-profit world about child abuse and neglect, I couldn't have been more wrong. Child abuse doesn't always look like that bruised, malnourished, and unhygienic kid sitting in a desk. It's simply not as clear cut as that.

The reality is most reports of suspected child abuse and neglect come from educators. They are often times a trusted adult that spends the most time with children. Adding in an annual training requirement seems like a cost-effective way to strengthen the knowledge and efficiency of our front line of defense to this issue.

I am also so happy to see that early childhood professionals and those working at licensed daycares are included. These educators spend their entire day caring for our most vulnerable children who sometimes don't even know the words yet to say something even if they had the opportunity. These professionals also help young children with diapering and clothing and may see the physical signs of abuse that may otherwise go unnoticed.

I'm confident the people who oppose this bill will say things like they already have too much training to do, or that the training is redundant. While I can empathize with how much training needs to be done each year for everyone with a license everywhere- I am not sure I can think of a more important topic. The reality is our laws surrounding things like child abuse, neglect, maltreatment, gross sexual imposition, corruption of a minor, etc. are changing constantly. As you all know, the state recently changed essentially our entire juvenile code. We have multiple new human service zones now, and a centralized reporting process. It is a misdemeanor offense to not report suspected abuse or neglect as a mandated reporter, but if you aren't confident what our NDCC defines this as, how can you feel confident in knowing you are reporting what you are supposed to?

The people who would oppose this bill may mention the necessity of doing it this frequently. In my profession, we are required to take 3 hours of Boundary Hours every 3 years, and this could include training for mandated reporters. Did I learn appropriate boundaries in school? Absolutely. However, there are unfortunately providers who continually need reminders on what appropriate boundaries are and to stress the importance of the boundaries in place.

I can speak from the news cycle in Fargo recently, and we have had:

- Keven Kennedy- March, 2022- Fargo South High School English Teacher- fired for inappropriate boundaries and comments with students
- Ronald Thompson- Sentenced September 2022 for luring a minor by computer
- Sebastian Tackling- December 2022- West Fargo Band Teacher- Corruption of a Minor (minor was his student)
- Ruthie Anne Carlson- Jan 2023- FPS Employee- charged with GSI (minor was her student)
- Alyssa Holzheimer- Dec 2022- daycare center teacher being charged with child abuse
- Daniel Stoa- Feb 2023- lawsuit filed in retaliation for reporting a coach for inappropriately touching children

This is just over the last couple months, in one city. Clearly, abuse and neglect is not only happening at home- **it is still happening in our schools and daycares and with school and daycare employees.** Ensuring all educators understand the standard and the law I think is of utmost importance. Ignorance simply can't be an excuse.

Another fear from the people who oppose this bill is an increase in the amount of "frivolous claims". I believe more training would likely prevent what could be considered a frivolous claim, or a claim that doesn't meet the requirements for reporting. Training should increase the quality and efficiency of the reporting process. This means we are ensuring that the things that need to be reported are, the things that don't constitute child abuse or neglect aren't, and the process is completed correctly.

This training is free, already created, and available, and takes less than an hour in a self-paced course. Continuing education is vital. One of the most dangerous attitudes in my mind is thinking we know it all or we know enough. After all, those who think they know it all have no way of finding out that they don't. If we don't have the time to make sure everyone working with children knows how to effectively protect them, what do we have the time for?

Thank you for your time today. I encourage your committee to give **HB1144** a Do Pass recommendation. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Amy Kempfer
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