

1 SB2340 – Counselor Positions-Requirement

2 Mandan Public Schools – Carly Retterath Testimony

3 Good morning Chairman Elkin and members of the Education committee. For the record, my  
4 name is Carly Retterath. I am the Alternative Education Director for Mandan Public Schools. I  
5 am here today to urge you to give SB 2340 a Do Pass recommendation.

6 I became the director of Alternative Education in Mandan Public Schools four years ago and I  
7 have seen first-hand the increase of significant mental and behavioral health needs of students.  
8 There is no doubt that increased counseling support in our buildings is essential to address these  
9 needs however, the shortage of school counselors and the increasing therapeutic needs of students  
10 makes the current requirement extremely difficult for schools to meet and even when it is met it  
11 may not address the needs of our students.

12 This past school year Mandan Public Schools was able to fill two out of the five counseling  
13 positions the district had open. District personnel attended career fairs, reached out to universities,  
14 and continued to advertise these positions well into the school year starting, with no luck in filling  
15 the remaining openings. Despite the inability to fill these positions, MPS recognized the  
16 importance of student behavioral and mental health needs and took steps to address these through  
17 school based clinical counseling and social work support. Right now, MPS partners with Together  
18 Counseling, who currently provides individual clinical counseling to over fifty students  
19 kindergarten through twelfth grade. In addition, Together Counseling has helped to cover general  
20 school counseling services at the middle school who is shorthanded due to the tragic passing of  
21 one of their school counselors. Even though the district has gone above and beyond to address  
22 school counseling needs in creative ways, as this law is currently written MPS cannot count those  
23 services towards their ratio.

24 The increasing mental health needs of students as well as the expanding of social emotional  
25 learning in all classrooms has shifted the type of counseling supports needed in schools. In many  
26 ways the traditional lessons and activities that school counselors would provide classes are now a  
27 part of their everyday curriculum. I am by no means saying that school counselors are no longer

28 needed, in many ways they are need now more than ever, but their roles may look different. We  
29 need school counselors that can run social skills groups, meet one on one with students to process  
30 trauma they are experiencing, provide families supports and strategies for home and help the  
31 school to identify students in crisis who need through care. In addition to school counselors there  
32 are many trained clinical counselors, social workers, and psychologists that could offer these  
33 needed services and in many ways are more qualified to provide them.

34 North Dakota does not require quotas for teachers, principals, social workers, librarians, or any  
35 other professional. School counselors are great and the work they do is invaluable, but does it  
36 make sense that they are the only education professionals with a quota? The issue with a quota is  
37 that when a school has 310 students, the school now needs 1.03 counselors. DPI is required to  
38 administer the law as it is passed. How can a school find a 3% FTE licensed school  
39 counselor? A guideline would work much better in the real world than a quota. By expanding  
40 the definition of “Counselor” schools are able to meet the requirement of this bill and better  
41 serve the students in their care

42 ND does not require quotas for teachers, principals, social workers, librarians, or any other I urge  
43 you to give SB 2340 a DO PASS recommendation. I would be happy to stand for any questions.