

Chairman Elkin, Vice Chairman Bear, and the Members of the Committee,

Thank you for reading this testimony.

I have served as the School Counselor for the North Dakota Center for Distance Education since 2019. I am also a member of North Dakota's School Counseling Association. I am recommending a vote of DO NOT PASS for SB 2340 as it is written. While I do feel the intent of the bill was to support the role of the School Counselor and to allow schools to come up with new ways to support more students, the way in which the law is written makes the School Counselor optional. As a serving School Counselor for NDCDE, I work mainly as an Academic Advisor. I help students make sure they have the classes necessary for graduation, getting them Choice Ready, and assisting them as they begin to apply for colleges or enter the workforce or military. Our agency is continuously looking for new ways to help support students, families, and parents through our services.

Many times, School Counselors wear multiple hats. They are the ones making sure kids meet Choice Ready guidelines set forth by North Dakota's State ESSA Plan, they help with school activities, do large classroom resiliency lessons, small group sessions tailored to specific student needs, one on one counseling for students that need more intense intervention, assist with college applications, write letters of recommendation, provide information on scholarships, help students find jobs, and overall become better members of our community.

I am also a mother to two elementary children in West Fargo. I have heard stories about kids' behavior at school. Most days my kids don't want to attend school due to the behavior of others and the distraction it causes to their own learning. While all students benefit from a School Counselor, the students that have trouble socially and/or academically are the kids that need this service most. Please consider amending this bill to ensure we do not harm the kids of ND by removing the role of the School Counselor but instead offering schools and students more support.

It would be beneficial to speak with our ND School Counseling Association President April Foth. Guidance and discussion with North Dakota's School Counselors should be considered when writing a bill that affects them and their position. Let the people closest to the work tell you what needs they have and give suggestions on how to help. Support these professionals with incentives, student access to free professional counseling, and by restricting duties the School Counselor is often tasked to provide (ex: conduct state testing/ACT testing).

School Counselors are needed now more than ever. As the bill is written I would recommend a vote of DO NOT PASS. North Dakota kids deserve it.

Thank you,

Jocelyn Kolle