NDESPB
Education Standards and Practices Board

2718 Gateway Avenue, Suite 204
Bismarck, ND 58503
Phone: 701-328-9641 • www.nd.gov/espb

Testimony SB 2337
Senate Workforce Development Committee
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Education Standards and Practice Board
Dr. Rebecca Pitkin

Good afternoon, Chairman Wobbema, and members of the Committee. My name is Rebecca Pitkin, and I am the Executive Director of the Education Standards and Practices Board (ESPB) and I am here to provide details regarding the scope of our work.

North Dakota is one of the 22 states that has moved the profession forward by authorizing an independent board of ten educators, administrators, school board members, and teacher educators. The board is appointed by the Governor to two 3-year terms and meets monthly.

In 1995, ESPB became an independent board with the responsibility of teacher licensure, teacher education program approval, professional development, and professional practices. As an independent board it carries out its duties funded by the licensure fees of the educators in North Dakota.

Given the enormous responsibility of licensing individuals who work with the children in our state, our board operates the following non-negotiables:

1. We do what is best for students
2. We do not make decisions based solely on money
3. We work with our stakeholders which include the North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders, School Board's Association, ND United, the teacher's union, the Department of Public Instruction, and serve all licensed individuals to include teachers, principals, and superintendents.

Licensing

ESPB issues approximately 12,000 licenses each year and there are approximately 18,000 active licenses; there are six types of initials licenses and eight different types for renewal, depending on their current positions and transcripts which are reviewed by staff. Licenses are renewed every two or five years. Our ND Teach system houses all license applications and enables us to interact with the Department of Public Instruction as they provide specific credentials. Licenses are issued electronically, and we are currently undergoing a one hundred and fifty thousand dollar system upgrade in collaboration with DPI to provide additional document storage and additional ease of access for applicants. Our license processing time is days, and sometimes hours once we receive needed materials and an individual's BCI/FBI background check. Our staff, several of whom were teachers and administrators themselves and understand the workings of teacher qualifications, work closely with schools to ensure all employees are appropriately licensed. We have recently added procedures to assist the transition of foreign applicants and removed fees for military spouses before it was required by law-my experience of holding licenses in eight states made ease of transition a priority. To ensure the safety of students ESPB requires a BCI/FBI background check for all applicants and upon renewal all applicants are required to self-report any offenses, their names are checked in a National Clearinghouse which houses all sanctions against a teacher in all 50 jurisdictions. We follow the FBI/BCI requirements and all board members are trained in them. This is a critical part of our process and a commitment to our state and its children. We have made recent updates to our application to clarify what applicants must reveal about work history, offenses, investigations, and denials. Our staff reviews applications question by question and may require additional information; our board reviews application if there are any reds flags. Our staff has the expertise to do this as our

most recent hire (a staff addition) has been there six years and the others eighteen, eleven, and ten; I am the second executive director since 1995.

Program Approval

There are eleven teacher education programs in North Dakota and in conjunction with a national accreditation agency (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation), ESPB conducts program evaluation and approval with site visits every seven years. ESPB requires annual reports from each institution and works closely with higher education faculty to implement statute and develop standards. Our office also provides ethics training for student teachers using the Model Code of Educators Ethics developed by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification.

Applicant Satisfaction

It is no secret we are experiencing a teacher workforce shortage and ESPB works with our stakeholders to find solutions to the shortage in a way that does not lessen requirements or quality for our North Dakota children. ESPB strives to assist and support our K-12 teachers and answers over 100 phone calls each day. In addition, we receive approximately 12,000 emails in our general accounts in addition to the ones that come to our five employee emails.

ESPB prides itself on customer relations and working with our licensees on a variety of challenges they many have. Customer service is a value, and we desire to keep the teachers we have and to promote our profession. Our satisfaction survey, available after every interaction and collected the past 6 years is 99% positive in all areas to include responsiveness of staff, timeliness, availability, courtesy, knowledge, ease of obtaining information. Our board reviews this data annually and changes are made as needed to increase efficiency. We often hear from out

of state applicants that we "actually answer the phone" and have structured our office hours for before and after school and during lunch.

Professional Practices

Our board receives approximately 100 complaints each year. Our office follows the process of serving a copy of the complaint and any documentations to the individual and the board reviews the complaint and response to determine if the individual's license should be subject to action by the board. Our office also closely monitors the national pulse regarding the issue of "grooming" either electronically or in person and recently wrote administrative rules to broaden this definition to reflect the trend of cases seen in North Dakota and across the nation. Engagement in national groups assists us in implementing best practices and developing policies that protect children and teachers. All case information is password protected on a secure site, available only to board members.

Professional Development

ESPB's final area of responsibility is teacher mentoring. The Teacher Support System (TSS), which receives a flow through grant from the Department of Public Instruction and the Governor's Office falls under the ESPB office responsibilities although directed by its own staff. The TSS offered mentoring to all first year teachers this past year and also trains instructional coaches to support teachers in their work.

Office

The landscape of teaching is ever changing and the issues and trends we consider, adopt, research, and are asked to be involved in are endless. Our staff attends training, participates in

book studies, and collaborates frequently to ensure their skill level is increasing. Our staff is dedicated and caring, an element much needed in our culture. We work as a team and know our work matters if it is only listening to a teacher who is frustrated and needs someone to listen. Teachers needs an agency such as ESPB whose specificity of task matches their needs. The ESPB Board requests a do not pass on SB 2337. This ends my testimony, and I will answer any questions.