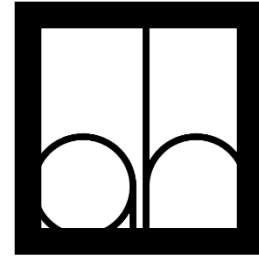


Alex Hennix
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January 11, 2025

Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alex Hennix, and I serve as the superintendent of Kenmare Public School. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to share my testimony today, and I would like to especially thank Representative Kiefert for sponsoring this important bill.

Our public schools are more than just places of learning; they are second homes for children, where they spend over 170 days each year. We know our students well, and we care deeply for their well-being. While the Department of Human Services does excellent work in supporting families, there remains a critical gap in the process—follow-up. Too often, schools are left in the dark, unable to advocate for the children we know best.

In Kenmare, we have seen the tragic consequences of this gap, particularly for our most vulnerable students. On January 12, 2014, one of our students lost his life at the hands of his mother after enduring years of neglect and abuse. He was only 13 years old and weighed just 21 pounds when he was found. This student had been repeatedly reported to social services by our school, but despite our efforts, the child was removed from our care and eventually homeschooled until his heartbreaking death. This is just one example of the lack of follow-up that has devastating consequences. We continue to see children suffer from abuse and neglect time and time again, with our only option often being to file a 960 report. More often than not, we later learn that no abuse or neglect was substantiated—even when, from our training as mandated reporters, we know it is happening.

We remain devastated that, despite our concerns and repeated reports, our hands were tied when it came to follow-up. We know confidentiality is important, and we respect the privacy of families. But as educators, we know these children and their families better than anyone, and we are often the first line of defense in protecting them.

I strongly believe that establishing a liaison between schools and Human Services would significantly improve communication and ensure more comprehensive support for our children. Just as schools have dedicated liaisons for students experiencing homelessness or in foster care, I believe it is crucial to have the option of a trained liaison who can facilitate communication with Human Services when necessary.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this vital step in better supporting our children and ensuring their safety and well-being.

Sincerely,
Alex Hennix
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