



# Protection & Advocacy Project

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Education Committee

House Bill 1095 - January 13, 2025

Testimony of Brad Peterson, Legal Director

Greetings Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee. My name is Brad Peterson and I am the Legal Director at the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project (P&A). P&A is an independent state agency established in 1977 to assert and advance the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities. The agency's programs and services seek to make positive changes for people with disabilities where we live, learn, work and play.

P&A opposes the bill in current form; however, if it is the wish of the committee to pass this bill there are some necessary amendments we request.

Protection and Advocacy requests that amendments be made to this bill. If a liaison is required, it is in the best interest of the students, that the liaison is not a faculty member, including a counselor, social worker, administrator, or any other district employee. A liaison should be an impartial individual that interfaces with the district, school, student, and/or parents when there is a report of suspected abuse or neglect. A faculty member in any job title or position would be able to have knowledge and/or awareness of information about the child and/or family which could cloud the impartiality necessary to participate in protective services investigations and realize objective outcomes. It could also harm positive relationships between parents, district, and school staff. These relationships are the foundation of trust, communication, and support between the parents and faculty members. Faculty members are already stretched to the limit as they increasingly take on more responsibility for education and protecting the safety and well-being of students. Adding the role of liaisons to their already overflowing plates could complicate the challenges of teacher retention and job satisfaction; something every school faces.

An unintended consequence of designating faculty members as liaisons is the jeopardy of reports of suspected abuse and neglect reports to ICPS, P&A, and police not being made. Reports need to be made to an entity/person who is not part of the district or school and someone who is not housed at the school.

Protection & Advocacy supports collaboration between school districts and child protective services; however, we ask that you contemplate the potentially negative consequences of this bill. In its current form this bill will not serve the best interest of those it is intended to protect.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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