

January 18, 2025

Kathy Frelich
State Capital
Bismarck, ND 58505

RE: HB1247 Relating to protection of a student victim of sexual assault

Dear: Assembly Members, Senators, and Representative's:

My name is Paula Vistad, I recently retired after ten years as Devils Lakes Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce. A job I took very seriously, but there is no job taken more seriously than that of a parent.

My husband, Kevin and I have been residents in the Devils Lake area for over 43 years. We have owned a business and raised our two beautiful children in the Devils Lake area.

I strongly support HB1247. Students and families across the county struggle with the devastating impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Yet in many cases, victims don't even acknowledge that they've been sexually harassed/assaulted. That's because victims have come to accept sexual harassment as normal and sexual assault as their fault.

In addition several school districts will use their power to shut down complaints to avoid being sued after failing to respond appropriately to reported sexual harassment and sexual assault. Whether the harassment/assault occurred at school, on the internet, or in another location, every student should be guaranteed an equal education free of sexual harassment and gender discrimination.

Parents are shocked when they learn how school districts put liability and reputation ahead of students' well-being.

The districts should listen to its students and provide survivor services and sexual education....but I ask, "What are they doing to prevent sexual assault from happening in the first place?"

Schools need to increase education on sexual assault, bystander intervention and the cultural norms that encourage sexual violence. The time is now to invest in the safety of students and prevent such a preventable tragedy.

Paula Vistad
Concerned Citizen