

My name is Trista Ziegelmann, I currently hold a Bachelor's Degree in sSocial Studies Secondary Education and a Master's Degree in Counseling and Student Affairs, and have worked as a Professional School Counselor for 16 years. I currently work in a growing school district of close to 1,100 students and have a current caseload of 320 high school students, expected to grow to 350 next year. I am writing in opposition to HB 1449, a bill to "amend and reenact section 15.1-06-19 of the North Dakota Century Code relating to school counselor position requirements".

School counselors help all students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. By grouping other helping professions or career advisors into counselor positions, we are not creating equitable systems to support our learners. My work with students often is done in collaboration with the mental health counselor, social worker, special education teacher, school resource officer. To say a different helping profession is equal to that of a school counselor is not accurate.

Not all students have access to the mental health providers, whether because of cost or lack of insurance, lack of parental involvement or support, lack of resources or knowledge of. The National Institutes of Health, cite the "Lack of providers and geographic isolation are 2 major contributors to reduced access to youth mental health services in rural areas" and "Significant inequities in school-based mental health services exist outside of urban areas (Graves)." Not all students have access to school-based social workers for the same or similar reasons. All students have access to school counselors.

Career advisors, while within a portion of the work of School Counselors, lack the professional and comprehensive training of a school counselor and only focus on a fragment of a portion of what consumes a students' school day.

While HB 1449 seems of offer a short-term resolution to the school counselor shortage and growing needs of learners and school districts, HB 1449 will cause harm and gaps in services in the long-term. All students have access to school counselors and HB 1449 will erode access and further the disparities to support services for students and families, and harm school districts in the long-term.

Graves JM, Abshire DA, Mackelprang JL, Dilley JA, Amiri S, Chacon CM, Mason A. Geographic Disparities in the Availability of Mental Health Services in U.S. Public Schools. *Am J Prev Med.* 2023 Jan;64(1):1-8. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2022.09.003. Epub 2022 Oct 22. PMID: 36283908; PMCID: PMC9772127.