



1 **Testimony in Support of House Bill 1449**

2 Chairman Heinert and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify in
3 support of House Bill 1449, which seeks to reinforce the availability of school counselors for
4 students across North Dakota. As the Executive Director of the North Dakota Council of
5 Educational Leaders, I strongly support this bill because it directly impacts the well-being and
6 success of our students. We've been seeking to amend this section of code for the past couple
7 sessions. This is the only section of century code that still has a ration of how many positions we
8 are to hire – each other position ratio has been redacted from code. We attempted to do the same
9 with this position requirement by adjusting the definition of counselor to expand it to reflect the
10 people we ARE hiring to fill the roles we need in our schools last session and the legislature did
11 not have an appetite to do so. We do, however, have a severe counselor shortage and meeting
12 that requirement is a physical impossibility and annually we are sent letters indicating we are
13 outside of the law – and that is of no fault of the district.

14 For years, our school leaders have been advocating for enhanced student support services,
15 particularly in mental health, career readiness, and personal development. The importance of
16 school counselors in ensuring student success cannot be overstated. School counselors provide
17 critical services, including academic advising, social-emotional support, crisis intervention, and
18 career planning. However, as student needs have increased, our capacity to meet them has not
19 kept pace.

20 **Why This Bill Matters:**

21 **1. Flexibility for School Districts**

22 ○ House Bill 1449 recognizes the reality of staffing shortages by allowing districts
23 to demonstrate **good faith efforts** in recruiting counselors and utilizing alternative
24 methods, such as shared services or virtual counseling. This flexibility is essential
25 for our rural and frontier schools that may struggle to fill these positions.

26 **2. Transparency and Accountability**

27 ○ The bill requires schools to document and share their efforts to meet counseling
28 requirements. This ensures that student support remains a priority while allowing
29 for practical solutions in meeting the need.

30 As educators and leaders, we know that students thrive when they feel supported. Investing in
31 school counselors is an investment in **student success, workforce development, and stronger**
32 **communities**. I urge you to **support House Bill 1449** to help ensure that every North Dakota
33 student has the resources they need to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

34 Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.