

To the ND Legislative Staff,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the introduction of chaplains in public schools. The presence of chaplains in these institutions raises significant concerns regarding the separation of church and state, the potential for religious coercion, and the adequacy of their qualifications to provide essential student support services.

Public schools are intended to be secular environments where students of all religious backgrounds, as well as those with no religious affiliation, can learn without religious influence. Introducing chaplains into these settings risks infringing upon this principle, potentially leading to religious coercion and the undermining of students' religious freedom rights. There are plenty of parochial schools for those who desire that type of learning environment.

Chaplains are typically not trained or certified to provide educational or mental health services to youth. Allowing them to assume roles traditionally filled by qualified professionals, such as counselors, could compromise the quality of support services available to students.

The introduction of chaplains into public schools may lead to religious coercion, where students feel pressured to participate in religious activities or adopt specific religious beliefs. This environment can be particularly challenging for students from diverse religious backgrounds or those who are nonreligious.

Thank you for considering my perspective on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Heinrich