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February 9, 2025

House Education Committee
Pat D. Heinert

Subject: Testimony Regarding House Bill 1490

Dear Mr. Pat Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to House Bill 1490 that would enact a new section to chapter 15.1-13 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to required psychological evaluations for school counselors. As a licensed school counselor for 6 years, I oppose this bill because it implies that the expertise, training, and ethical standards that school counselors bring to their work are somehow insufficient.

At the heart of this issue is the safety and well-being of our students. As a school counselor, I am deeply committed to ensuring that students feel safe, supported, and valued in their school environment. Our role is essential in addressing not only academic needs but also the emotional and psychological challenges that students face.

First, I want to address the fact that school counselors are already highly trained professionals. Becoming a school counselor requires completing a master's degree in counseling with a minimum of 60 credit hours, including both practicum and internship hours. We are also required to pass national certification exams and adhere to strict ethical standards set by both state licensing boards and national organizations like the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). The rigor of this education and training ensures that we have the skills necessary to serve students.

Second, the proposed psychological evaluation under House Bill 1490 would imply that counselors, despite already having extensive training and being held to high ethical standards, are somehow unqualified or unable to meet the demands of the profession. It singles out school counselors without imposing similar requirements on other individuals who work individually with students, such as coaches, paraprofessionals, teachers, school psychologists, and administrators. The bill unfairly targets school counselors, potentially creating an environment of distrust in the expertise of a whole profession.

Third, I am concerned that this bill could have a negative impact on the recruitment and retention of school counselors in North Dakota. Our state, like much of the country, is already facing a shortage of school counselors. This shortage is due in part to the immense demands placed on counselors and insufficient funding for school counseling programs. Requiring psychological evaluations would further burden an already overworked profession and deter potential candidates from entering the field.

Finally, the psychological evaluation requirement could create a stigma around counseling professionals. It implies that school counselors are at risk of being mentally unfit for their roles simply by virtue of the work they do. This misperception could harm both the reputation of the profession and the support system we strive to build for students. Instead of increasing barriers, we should focus on creating a supportive and understanding environment for counselors to ensure they can continue to do their important work.

I urge you to oppose this bill. Rather than placing additional burdens on school counselors, we should focus on strengthening the support systems already in place for student safety, mental health, and well-being across all educational professionals. School counselors are committed to the success and safety of our students, and the additional requirement of a psychological evaluation is unnecessary and damaging to the profession. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Brandy Klusmann
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