

North Dakota Legislative Assembly
600 E Boulevard Ave
Bismarck, ND 58505

Opposition to House Bill 1490 – Psychological Evaluations for School Counselors

Dear Members of the North Dakota Legislative Assembly,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill 1490, which mandates psychological evaluations for school counselors as a prerequisite for working one-on-one with students. This bill is not only unnecessary but also unfairly targets school counselors in a manner that does not align with practices for other educational professionals.

First and foremost, no other school-based professional—including administrators, teachers, or athletic coaches—is subjected to such psychological evaluations, despite many well-documented cases of misconduct across these roles, and statistically few for those in school counseling roles. Singling out school counselors for such a requirement implies an unfounded suspicion toward our profession, even though we adhere to rigorous training, ethical guidelines, and professional standards established by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). If the goal is to ensure student safety, a more comprehensive and equitable approach should be considered rather than targeting one group of professionals without cause.

Additionally, this bill fails to address critical logistical and ethical concerns. Who will be responsible for the financial burden of these evaluations? Will school districts be required to pay, or will the cost fall on the counselors themselves? This could create an undue financial hardship on professionals who are already underpaid and overburdened. Furthermore, allowing school boards to select the evaluating psychologist raises serious concerns about objectivity. In smaller districts, where personal and political agendas can influence decisions, this process could be weaponized against counselors unfairly, creating an environment of distrust and bias.

Beyond these concerns, House Bill 1490 directly contradicts the pressing need for more school counselors in North Dakota. Our state already faces a shortage of school counselors, and imposing unnecessary barriers will only discourage qualified professionals from entering or remaining in the field. At a time when student mental health needs are at an all-time high,

especially in rural North Dakota, restricting access to trained professionals is counterproductive and harmful to the very students this bill aims to protect.

Furthermore, this bill interferes with the fundamental ethical responsibilities of school counselors. Confidentiality is a cornerstone of the counseling profession, and mandating psychological evaluations as a condition of practice undermines the trust between counselors, students, and families. The ASCA Code of Ethics upholds the necessity of a safe and confidential space for students to seek support, and this bill introduces an element of unnecessary oversight that may ultimately deter students from seeking the help they need. Further increasing the already staggering rates of suicide and suicidality existing within our borders.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to vote against House Bill 1490. If student safety is the true concern, the focus should be on comprehensive policies that apply to all educational professionals, not singling out school counselors with an unjustified and impractical mandate. I appreciate your time and consideration on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chaleigh Pedrini-Clark', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

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