

February 10, 2025

RE: Opposition to HB 1490

Dear Legislators:

I am writing as a 7-12 principal in rural southwest North Dakota to express my opposition to HB 1490, regarding mandatory psychological evaluations for licensed school counselors. While I understand the intention of ensuring student safety, this bill introduces significant challenges and potential unintended consequences that could negatively impact schools, students, and the counseling profession.

1. The bill undermines trust in licensed professionals. Licensed school counselors in North Dakota already meet rigorous certification requirements, including background checks, educational qualifications, and adherence to ethical standards. Requiring additional psychological evaluations presumes that school counselors, as a group, are predisposed to conditions that compromise student safety, an implication that is not supported by evidence. This undermines the trust in these professionals and diminishes the respect their credentials warrant.

2. The bill creates logistical and financial burdens. Requiring every school counselor to undergo a psychological evaluation every two years will create a significant financial and logistical burden on school districts, particularly in rural areas. In a state like North Dakota, where access to licensed psychologists is limited, securing timely evaluations could delay hiring or even deter qualified individuals from entering the profession. For districts already struggling to recruit and retain counselors, this bill could exacerbate shortages, leaving students without essential support services.

3. The bill impacts student access to critical services. School counselors are integral to the academic, emotional, and social success of students. By adding unnecessary hurdles to their employment, this bill risks reducing the availability of counseling services. In rural areas like ours, where mental health resources are already scarce, this could have devastating consequences for students who rely on counselors for support with personal challenges, college and career planning, and crisis intervention.

4. The bill lacks precedent and evidence. To my knowledge, no other state imposes such a requirement on school counselors. The absence of widespread implementation suggests that this approach is neither standard nor evidence-based. If the goal is to ensure student safety, resources would be better spent on initiatives that enhance the overall mental health infrastructure within schools, such as providing additional training for all staff or increasing access to mental health resources for students.

In conclusion, while student safety must always be a top priority, this bill is not the appropriate mechanism to achieve that goal. I urge the legislature to reconsider this proposal and explore alternative measures that support and enhance the role of school counselors without imposing unnecessary burdens. Let us work together to ensure that North Dakota's students have access to the high-quality support services they deserve.

Thank you for considering my perspective.

Sincerely,
Shannon Meier