

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing in opposition to ND Bill 1490, pertaining to psychological assessments of school counselors. I am an elementary school counselor in Jamestown, ND, and have been employed in this role for 8 years. This bill implies that school counselors are at greater risk of victimizing children than other professionals who are also alone with children. As written, it is unclear what this psychological assessment would entail. A bill such as this could increase the rate of mental health stigma and prevent school counselors from receiving necessary treatment out of fear of not being employable.

North Dakota school counselors complete a 60 credit master's program including an intensive internship that includes evaluations by both faculty and site supervisors who closely monitor concerns of confidentiality, ethics, and safety concerns. Being admitted into this master's level program is competitive and typically entails an extensive interview process. Compared to the vast majority of educators and support staff that work in a public school, school counselors have many professionals ensuring they are safe to enter the field before they begin their work. In the state of ND, paraprofessionals need only to complete a background check and an interview with a school in order to be hired to work with kids one-on-one directly, including completing bathroom freshening at times. Administrators and teachers are often one-on-one with students behind closed doors.

Safety of our children is the top priority. If there were a psychological assessment that educators could complete that ensures they will not be predatory or unsafe around our children, I would absolutely support this, but no such assessment exists. Psychological assessments can be an extensive battery of examinations, or as simple as a 45-minute interview with a client. As written, it is unclear what this psychological assessment will entail. I am also concerned about who has access to this information and what criteria would be used to deem a school counselor psychologically unfit for employment. Many school counselors, and for that matter, educators of all kids, seek out personal therapy and psychological medications to treat anxiety or depression. I am concerned that this will increase the stigma for seeking out treatment for these professionals and increase the rates of mental health disorders throughout education.

I appreciate you considering this testimony. Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns. I'd be happy to discuss this topic further.

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