

Written Testimony in Support of HB1490

Chairman Heinert and House Education Committee:

For the record, my name is Katherine Terras, and I am testifying today as a parent. I am in support of HB1490. I have read the testimony opposing this bill, and I genuinely and respectfully understand the concerns from the professionals who submitted this testimony. My initial concern was about discrimination against school counselors, and I am so grateful for their training and their dedication to students. As I reflected on this further, my thoughts began to shift away from what is best for school counselors to what is best for children. In my research, I learned that parental notice nor consent needs to be obtained before a student is separated from their peers to receive one-on-one counseling. I believe parents need to give their informed, written consent before their child is separated to receive this service, which is typically conducted behind closed doors. Yet, when students receive individualized specialized instruction and related services (speech, OT, PT), the school must obtain informed, written parental consent. When students are administered an individualized assessment by a school psychologist, informed written parental consent must be obtained, too. If students are in the care of a school nurse, there is a high likelihood that the student has an individualized health plan per the release of medical information that parents gave consent for the school to access. Essentially, if a parent has the right to give their informed written consent before their child participates in therapeutic counseling sessions outside of the school building, parents certainly should retain this right when their child enters the school building. Further, if a student needs mental health services, it is the parent's right to select a provider who aligns with their cultural, philosophical, and religious/spiritual worldview.

As I parent, I am left to ask, what are the safeguards and protections for children when it comes to school counseling services? Where are the parental rights? In my professional role, I follow legal and ethical standards, like most educators and counselors, and as a parent I am thankful. However, one needs to do about 60-minutes of research to read the minutes of the ND Education Standards and Practices Board to understand the alleged the violations to the ethics code and NDCC made by educators and administrators, which is why a lawyer from the ND Office of Attorney General is present at these meetings. To this point, if there can be protective safeguards put into place for children, then yes, I support this bill.