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Testimony in Opposition to HB 1491

Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding HB 1491.

My name is Zack Volson, and I am currently a senior at Drake-Anamoose High School. This academic year, I have had the honor of representing the North Dakota High School Activities Association as the distinguished student. Their website states, “The NDHSAA Distinguished Student program was developed to recognize deserving young people who are the “backbone” of interscholastic activities, not necessarily the leader, but the individual whose participation in high school activities strengthens the program for participants, the school, and the community.” I believe this describes the goal of high school sports and activities and HB 1491 makes this a nearly impossible task. I am a very active student in many programs offered by the North Dakota High School Activities Association, and I can assure you vital life lessons such as becoming a leader, building relationships, learning community culture, embracing change, and handling emotions are taught through the highs and lows of playing on your hometown team. We need more students in our state and country that work to make the environment they are in a better place. Remember, the grass is greener where you water it. Therefore, I am testifying in opposition of HB 1491.

If passed, this bill would have a negative impact on our students, teaching them it is ok to run when life gets hard. An unlimited number of transfers would be allowed under this bill meaning that one week a student could choose to attend Drake High School, the next week Towner High School, and the following week Velva High School with no consequences. This means a student could attend over 30 high schools in one academic year. A student might do this to win a sports championship by playing for one team until they lose out of playoffs and then transferring to a school still in the playoffs to continue playing. For example, my school’s football team defeated the Langdon Area football team in the semifinals this year. Under this bill, those kids would have been eligible to transfer to Kindred and play on that team against us in the state championship.

With this type of transfer portal available for students, it is guaranteed recruitment will happen. Our students should not be viewed by schools as something they can buy. Our students also do not need to deal with the stress to perform at such a young age as it negatively impacts their mental health. The stress will cause anxiety and soon their education will be negatively affected as they fall behind. This bill states that it would be assumed that no recruitment ever takes place. To me that’s like saying no speeding takes place on the highway, we must be honest with ourselves. We must allow the North Dakota High School Activities Association to investigate recruiting practices to ensure it is not happening. This only benefits the students in the long run.

Finally, as an aspiring teacher and educational administrator, I question the issues this will make for our school system. What happens when a student transfers and the English class at the new

school is halfway through a novel? Is that student exempt or will they have to read the book and complete all the previous work. From a math standpoint, a student might be struggling learning basic linear equations, but their new school's class has moved into polynomial functions. Should that student not have to learn basic functions or are the teachers expected to put the rest of their students on hold to catch one person up? There will be significant learning gaps created if this bill were to pass. We all know the struggle hiring teachers has become and an unstable student base will not make these positions any more desirable.

I strongly encourage you not to forget we are student-athletes. The goal of high school athletics is to teach lifetime values. This bill very negatively impacts how students learn, grow, and strive not just on a basketball court or in a speech competition, but also in school, their careers, and life. Please consider students, teachers, educational leaders, and those who work tirelessly at the North Dakota High School Activities Association to support our student athletes and the success of their futures.

In closing, this bill will have negative impacts on students, activity programs, schools, and communities statewide. For these reasons and others provided in my testimony, I oppose HB 1491 and urge the House Education Committee to vote do not pass.

Thank you for your time,

Zack Volson