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February 11, 2025  
House Bill 1491  
House Education Committee  
Testimony of Matt Bakke

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 1491. This bill would create an environment that encourages athletic transfers without accountability, opening the door to a “free agency” model in high school sports. This would present a fundamental shift in the way the North Dakota High School Activities Association (NDHSAA) manages student-athlete transfers by eliminating recruitment and undue influence rules. This, coupled with immediate varsity eligibility based solely on a rental agreement, poses a serious risk to our state's values defining education-based athletics. By removing these requirements, this bill allows for unchecked movement between schools, fostering inequities, disrupting team dynamics, and diminishing opportunities for student-athletes who remain committed to their local programs.

The NDHSAA has long provided a structured yet flexible system for handling transfer cases, ensuring a balance between student opportunity and competitive fairness. Over 90% of NDHSAA member schools support the existing transfer regulations, recognizing that they protect student-athletes and the integrity of high school sports. The current system allows for exceptions based on legitimate family circumstances while discouraging transfers driven solely by athletic advantage. Abandoning these principles in favor of an unregulated transfer landscape would be a disservice to our students, schools, and communities.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to reject HB 1491. Preserving the integrity of high school athletics ensures that participation remains an extension of the educational experience. I appreciate your time and consideration in upholding the best interests of our student-athletes and the broader educational mission of North Dakota schools.

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