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HB 1494
Testimony of Amy De Kok
House Education Committee
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Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Amy De Kok, and I serve as the executive director for the North Dakota School Boards Association. I am here today to voice our strong support for HB1494, which seeks to increase the weighting factor in the school district foundation aid formula for English language learners (ELLs). This critical legislation will help ensure that school districts receive adequate funding to support the unique needs of ELL students and provide them with the educational resources necessary to succeed.

North Dakota's student population is becoming increasingly diverse, with a growing number of students whose first language is not English. ELL students face distinct challenges in the classroom, requiring specialized instruction, additional staff support, and targeted programs to help them achieve language proficiency while mastering academic content. Research consistently shows that adequately funding ELL programs leads to better educational outcomes, increased graduation rates, and long-term economic benefits.

The current funding model does not fully account for the intensity of resources required to support ELL students, particularly those in the early stages of English proficiency. HB1494 proposes increasing the weighting factors for ELL students at different proficiency levels to better reflect the actual costs of effective language instruction and academic support.

The Benefits of HB 1494:

1. **Enhanced Educational Equity:** By increasing the weighting factor for ELL students, HB 1494 helps ensure that all students, regardless of their language background, receive the support they need to thrive in school. Providing equitable funding helps level the playing field and ensures that language barriers do not become a roadblock to academic success.
2. **Improved Student Outcomes:** Studies indicate that targeted ELL support, including bilingual instruction, smaller class sizes, and extended learning opportunities, significantly improves

academic performance and language acquisition. Increasing funding will enable schools to hire additional qualified ELL instructors, invest in evidence-based instructional programs, and provide professional development for teachers working with ELL students.

3. **Long-Term Economic Benefits:** Supporting ELL students in their educational journey leads to higher graduation rates, increased workforce participation, and greater economic contributions to the state. A well-educated, multilingual workforce is an asset to North Dakota's economy, enhancing the state's ability to compete in an increasingly global market.
4. **Alleviating the Financial Burden on Local School Districts:** Many districts, especially those with rapidly growing ELL populations, struggle to allocate sufficient resources under the current funding formula. By adjusting the weighting factors, HB 1494 provides districts with the financial flexibility needed to meet the instructional needs of ELL students without diverting resources from other critical programs.

The passage of HB 1494 is essential to ensure that North Dakota's education system remains responsive to the needs of all students. Increasing the weighting factor for ELL students is a necessary investment in the future of our state. I respectfully urge the committee to support this legislation and help provide the resources our schools need to offer high-quality education to every student, regardless of their language background.

Thank you for your time and consideration.