

## **Testimony on House Bill 1494**

### **February 3, 2025**

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Chairman Heinert and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Mari Rasmussen. I am a resident of North Dakota and vote in District 35. I am past president of Dakota TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), and I am here to testify in support of House Bill 1494. Dakota TESOL is an organization for those who provide educational services for students from other language backgrounds. The organization supports and advocates for high quality services for these students.

It is very important that we adequately fund the education of those students in our state who will be contributing to the strength of our economy and workforce once they graduate from high school. Full English language proficiency is necessary is not only important, but essential.

I have been a teacher of English Learners, program coordinator, national consultant and college professor. I currently work part time at the university level and part time in a school district. I was working at the Department of Public Instruction when the North Dakota legislature first passed legislation over 20 years ago to help support the education of English Learner students at the lowest levels of proficiency. While this effort was appreciated and the funding increased a bit in later years, it has never included all levels and reached the amount necessary to provide the services that are required by state and federal law.

We do ask that there would be some adjustments to the bill. I will leave it for my colleagues to provide information for you on a recommended level of funding for English

Learners in school districts in the state. My interest is to encourage you to support a bill that appropriately meets the needs of students.

School districts are required to provide services to students who qualify as English Learners immediately upon enrollment until they reach a level of proficiency that allows them to be successful in the general education classroom without support. Though it might appear that a student who enters school with no English needs more services and needs greatest level of funding, it can be argued that needs and the related costs of students vary greatly and the unique needs of a student who has “plateaued” in their English and needs a highly qualified English Learner teacher knowledgeable in the appropriate strategies to support the student to proficiency can also have a significant price tag. Unfortunately, due to the system, many English Learners who may be newly enrolled and have not participated in the annual testing and thus, are not yet counted for the additional weighted factor, or students at higher levels of proficiency who still need services, do not benefit from funding.

Members of House Education, I urge you to pass legislation that supports school districts in their efforts to fully meet the educational needs of all English Learners. Pass House Bill 1494 with recommended revisions. Thank you very much.