



# Protection & Advocacy Project

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Education Committee

House Bill 1530 - February 11, 2025

Testimony of Brenda Ruehl, P&A Director Program Services

Greetings Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee. My name is Brenda Ruehl and I'm a Director of Program Services at the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project (P&A). P&A is an independent state agency established in 1977 to assert and advance the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities. The agency's programs and services seek to make positive changes for people with disabilities where we live, learn, work and play.

P&A is in support of the passage of this study bill. Education is a priority area for P&A. Throughout the state P&A Disabilities Advocates and Directors work collaboratively with school districts, in Special Education and General Education, to ensure students with disabilities have access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). P&A also works with Special Education Directors to support teachers, paraprofessionals and related service staff to identify and obtain services and supports necessary for FAPE and for students to learn in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Students with social/emotional/behavioral health needs benefit when P&A and the IEP or 504 teams work to find solutions and supports for both the students and the teachers in the schools. Special education staff need training, support, and access to other highly qualified professionals to successfully meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Special education directors and teachers are often left out of the planning and decision-making for what special education is and should be. They are asked and required to do more with fewer teachers, inadequate training, and often without backup or support especially in crisis situations. Special education teachers must meet the regulations for assessments, evaluations, and IEP meetings that must include parents, yet teachers are not compensated for the time given to these processes outside of the usual school day. Special education teachers are buried with ever increasing paperwork while expected to train paraprofessionals, teach, maintain a safe learning environment for students and staff, and a multitude of other things identified in this bill.

Special education staff are tasked with making certain there is equity for students with disabilities while experiencing inequities in their own support, compensation, and job expectations. P&A urges a do pass on this study bill to identify those inequities for special education teachers and thus the education of students with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brenda Ruehl, Director Program Services

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