

Chairman Heinert and members of the committee,

My name is Nathan Horgeshimer from Halliday. I am a special education teacher at Killdeer High School and have been in that role for 14 years. I am testifying in support of House Bill 1530.

Special education is a rewarding field to work in that has its own specific set of challenges that differ from those of the rest of my teaching colleagues. This can lead to high teacher turnover and sometimes not being able to find applicants for open special education positions.

Special education teachers have large amounts of compliance paperwork to complete, schedule and run meetings, test students, complete observations, supervise and evaluate paraprofessionals, and many times are the point person dealing with the more extreme behavior issues that occur in our schools. This is all on top of the teaching duties that they have. In my case, I am currently am the case manager for 41 students, where in the past I would typically have somewhere between 15 to 22 students.

In my district, we've run into issues with turnover of special education staff, with teachers both leaving for other positions and leaving teaching entirely due to the amount of paperwork and other duties involved. We've also gone extended lengths of time with open special education positions posted. We've been fortunate, though, as other districts in Southwest ND have gone an entire school year without a special education teacher.

I can say that none of this is to speak poorly of my administration, both in the district and in our special education unit. They are great to work with and are willing to try things to alleviate the time commitments and workloads of teachers, and to better serve the students we have in our district. They have been very persistent in trying to find teachers, both in- and out-of-district, to fill those positions. But none of that changes that there aren't as many teachers coming into education, and that is especially true for special education. If we lose the teachers we currently have in our schools, who is going to replace them? When a teacher leaves and there is no replacement, it falls to the teachers that stay.

I support HB 1530 as this study can help pinpoint actions to be made to help retain the teachers that work with the highest-need students in the state.

Thank you for your time. Being on committees can be thankless work and I appreciate the time that all of you are putting into the bills brought before you.