



## **Opposition Testimony of SB 2105**

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Chairman Heinert, and Representatives of the House Education Committee,

My name is Chelsea Ridge, and I am the chairwoman of the North Dakota Public Health Association (NDPHA) Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Section. Our vision is a North Dakota where every person can live their healthiest life. I am here to provide Opposition testimony to SB 2105, the K-12 survey bill.

North Dakota's public health system consists of 28 decentralized local public health units working in partnership with the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services. We collaborate closely with local governments across our state to enhance and safeguard the health and safety of our citizens. In a combined effort to implement effective solutions for our local communities.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is a critical tool for communities striving to prevent youth alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. By collecting real-time data on adolescent behaviors, YRBS helps identify emerging trends, risk factors, and gaps in prevention efforts. Ultimately, YRBS empowers communities with the evidence needed to craft effective policies, allocate resources wisely, and implement prevention programs that truly make a difference in reducing youth substance use.

Prevention efforts for youth substance use rely on understanding risk factors (conditions that increase the likelihood of use) and protective factors (conditions that help prevent use). Risk factors include peer pressure, family history of substance use, and easy access to alcohol or drugs, while protective factors include strong family bonds, school engagement, and positive community support.<sup>i</sup>

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) helps local communities by providing data on these factors, identifying where youth are most vulnerable. For instance, if YRBS data shows high levels of underage drinking in a specific area communities can strengthen protective factors by implementing after-school programs, mentorship opportunities, or parental education initiatives. By using YRBS data, local leaders can design targeted prevention strategies that address root causes, ultimately fostering healthier, safer environments for youth.<sup>ii</sup>

Parents often have concerns about whether students should opt in or opt out of surveys like the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), particularly when it comes to sensitive topics such as

substance use, mental health, and risky behaviors. If concerns exist about survey content, they should be reviewed and addressed yearly rather than removing the survey entirely.

An opt-in system requires parents to actively give permission before their child can participate, which can significantly lower response rates. This may result in incomplete or biased data, as the students most at risk may be less likely to participate, either due to lack of parental engagement or concerns about the content.

On the other hand, an opt-out system allows for broader participation while still giving parents the choice to exclude their child. When fewer students take the survey, the data may not accurately reflect the real challenges within a community, making it harder for schools and local organizations to secure funding and design effective prevention programs.<sup>iii</sup>

Ensuring high participation rates is crucial for gathering reliable data that truly represents all youth experiences, allowing communities to address risks and strengthen protective factors effectively. Local public health measures need the flexibility to tailor interventions to meet the needs of our local communities. For all these reasons, we urge you to vote no on SB2105.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Sincerely,  
Chelsea Ridge

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<sup>i</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration; Risk and Protective Factors <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/20190718-samhsa-risk-protective-factors.pdf>, Accessed on March 10, 2025.

<sup>ii</sup> Sheri Lawal, MPH, CHES, Program Analyst, Injury and Violence Prevention, National Association of City County Health Officers, “*Steps to Implementing Drug Abuse Prevention Programs in Local Health Departments.*” March 11, 2015. NACCHOVoice. <https://www.naccho.org/blog/articles/steps-to-implementing-drug-abuse-prevention-programs-in-local-health-departments>, Accessed on March 10, 2025.

<sup>iii</sup> North Dakota Health and Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health Data Book, 2025. <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/BH/Data/2025%20BH%20DataBook.pdf> Accessed on March 10, 2025.