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Subject: Support for Changing the Special Education Category from "Emotional Disturbance" to "Emotional Disability"

To the North Dakota Legislative Assembly:

I am writing to express my strong support for changing the terminology of the special education category in the state of North Dakota from "Emotional Disturbance" to "Emotional Disability." This change is essential to better align with modern, respectful language that accurately reflects the challenges and experiences of students affected by this disability area.

The term "emotional disturbance" has long carried a negative connotation that can perpetuate stigma, misunderstanding, and even shame for students and their families. Changing the language of this category as "Emotional Disability" would promote a more respectful and supportive educational environment that fosters inclusion and understanding.

In my 20 years of experience as a school psychologist, I have seen how language can impact students' and families' attitudes and perceptions. It was typically my role as part of a special education multi-disciplinary team to explain to families the use of the term "Emotional Disturbance". This was always a confusing and disheartening experience for all involved. By updating this terminology, educators would be empowered to approach these discussions with greater empathy, providing students with an educational experience that encourages their strengths, fosters growth, maintains dignity, and enhances their well-being.

This change would be a positive step toward ensuring that students with emotional disabilities receive the respect, resources, and opportunities they deserve. Therefore, I respectfully urge the Assembly to support this proposed terminology update and to advocate for its adoption in policy and practice.

Thank you for considering this important change. I am confident that this adjustment in language will foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students.

Sincerely,



Kecia Peters